

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DENTON

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DATE: SEPTEMBER 4, 2011

SERMON: THE ONE SUNDAY IT'S OK TO TAKE A NAP IN CHURCH!

TEXT: MARK 6: 31-32

**He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.**

Have you ever been really exhausted?

Of course you have!

Maybe not from running a marathon or doing a triathlon.

Maybe not from pulling 60 hour work weeks for weeks and weeks on end.

Maybe not from two-a-day practices for volleyball or football.

Maybe not from taking 32 hours delivering a baby.

Sometimes it comes not from the physical but from the emotional. Carrying a burden too heavy for too long.

Grieving the loss of a loved one.

Or struggling through an unwanted divorce.

Or dealing with Alzheimer's disease.

And sometimes it comes from the spiritual. When your relationship with God is out of whack.

When life throws you a burden that you can't understand why a godly person ought to ever have to bear.

When your spiritual strength has all run out and you can't seem to get anymore.

Oh yes, in these and other ways we have experience with exhaustion. Our shared stories could fill a book. A fat hard back with tiny little type and a leather cover. But who in their right mind would want to spend their time reading about other people's struggles with exhaustion.

Well, nobody that I know, except maybe God, but God doesn't have to buy the hard-copy on e-Bay. God listens. God cares. God already knows your tribulations.

Our scripture is all about Jesus noticing that his disciples were worn out from ministering to the people and he tells them, what? To go away from the crowds and rest a while.

Doesn't that sound good?! Well, not all the time. We do need human contact but...sometimes we just need to rest.

- We need to phone to NOT ring.
- We need the boss to NOT come up with a new project and dump it in our lap and say "gitter-done."
- We need for our friends to NOT invite us to yet another a fabulous late-night party.
- We need a weekend when there are NO big chores or home remodeling projects to do.
- And we need our church to NOT plan a bunch of big new events that will mostly just exhaust us.

Rest. It's not a bad thing! God did it. After God created the universe and all that is in it, scripture says God took a day off to rest. Hey, if God can do it then surely we can! Right?

In fact, there are numerous places in the Old Testament, surely in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, where it talks about the Sabbath. The Sabbath is literally a day of rest. No work! Orthodox Jews take it to an extreme. No turning on a light switch. No using oven or microwave. No travel outside a small area. And, naturally, not pulling some ox out of a ditch! Simply - no work.

Some people try to make the Sabbath all about worship. Sorry. It's not. We do worship on the Sabbath as a part of the Sabbath but it's not supposed to be work.

Yes, Mark and I are here on Sunday and we do get paid but our efforts, while requiring work, are considered to be our “offering” to God.

Speaking of “offerings,” allow me a tangent. I want to point out a generational difference of understanding. Many of our older members understand our worshipful music to be a part of our “offerings to God.” Solos, duets, anthems, instrumental music, even hymns – our offerings to God. And understanding them in this way they are at times uncomfortable applauding something that to them is not “a performance” but “an offering.” Many younger folks understand this matter completely different – to them applause is “a word of encouragement” to those who step up and contribute something from their heart! Let me just say that I encourage people when they make offerings and/or express words of encouragement. I think there is room for both in the church!

Anyway, back to working at church on Sunday.

Wait, wait, another tangent. The pre-Jesus Sabbath was always on the seventh day of the week – Saturday. God rested after creating! That is still when our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate it. But the early church decided to celebrate its Sabbath on the day that Jesus arose – Sunday. Just so you know.

Ok, back to church work on Sundays. Let’s avoid it as best we can – as long as you remember that some of the things that we do on Sunday which take some exertion we do as an offering of our time, our talent, and our resources to God. Offerings are good as long as we are glad to give them.

But we Christians would sort of like for everyone to not have to work on Sundays. That would be nice but...we still want the hospitals open, don’t we. And we want to get food, somewhere, yes! And we want folks working on our big highway projects on the weekends when traffic jams will be less terrible. So our list of “exceptions” can grow fairly large – and besides, some people want to work on Sunday. And some people have to in order to make ends meet!

One of the problems with not working on Sunday is that we, the Church/Christians, are not in the business of legislating and imposing spiritual practices. That’s so Old Testamental, Middle Ages, so theocratic – so “not us.” We don’t impose – we encourage and seek to convince people to do good things, Godly things. We seek change though influence rather than legislation!

So, not imposing anything on other people, let's consider just us. God wants you to work hard but also God wants you to take a break - to rest. God knows how exhausted you are and God wants you to be physically, spiritually, and emotionally be renewed. And God says this over and over and over again. God talks about this way more than God talks about homosexuality!!

So, I'm going to make an exception to a personal rule. If anyone around you is sleeping - shhh! Let them rest. Maybe God will speak to them in their dreams. Maybe not...but maybe the most important thing they require to get through the coming week is a good rest and if God gives it to them today in church then maybe that is a Godly act.

For those of you still awake, remember, God cares about you! If you are exhausted, running on empty - then something is wrong. Something is out of balance. And God is concerned about your health.

Remember that in Matthew 11: 28-29, Jesus is quoted as saying "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Well, I think we should talk to God about how we can get some of that.

As for me, I'm tired. I think maybe God is telling me to sit and rest for a while and be refreshed through worship. All in favor say nothing. The eyes have it!