

God's love does not rest. God is love, and love naturally reaches past itself, constantly seeking out the places where it is needed most. This constant motion outward is the continual creation and renewal of God's Kingdom we read about today. God's love moves, it builds up, it endures, it heals, and it never ever stops, not even for a moment. King David and St. Paul, and the multitude of Jesus' followers all cooperated in this energy, and all of us, in every age, are invited to do the same. It is an extraordinary invitation.

As today's readings illustrate, there is one simple truth we must remember as we set out to participate in this divine energy, and that simple truth is the one most easily overlooked by all of us: God's love may not ever rest, but humans must. It is not weakness to rest; it is necessity. More than that, it is one of the gifts God seeks to bestow upon us. It is part of the created order of things.

Our first reading opens, "When David, the king, was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him **rest**." Later we read of **rest** as one of God's promises: "I will appoint a place for my people, and I will give you rest."

The Gospel passage reiterates this often-overlooked manifestation of God's concern for us. As the apostles hurry back to each other to share in the excitement of all they are doing, Jesus **doesn't** stir them into an even more industrious frenzy, rather, he redirects them:

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and **rest** a while." For many were coming and going, we are told, and they had no leisure even to eat. [When the crowds come, it is Jesus who goes to work to provide the throngs with what they need: sustenance and rest.]

I imagine a few of the apostles then wanted to get back to work. "So much to do, so little time." Rest was what they needed, but not necessarily what they wanted. Most of us do not rest easily. We are more comfortable when working on something than we are at rest.

Life is in fact quite busy; there is always at least one thing we forgot to do. There is always an email to return. There is always something around the house that needs to be cleaned up. And, if this is true for busy-work, how much more true it is for activities that we see as good – even, activities we see as 'God's work.'

We recall in the story of Martha and Mary how Martha gets frustrated at Mary for sitting at Jesus' feet rather than helping prepare lunch for him. Even more outrageous than this inexcusable offense is Jesus' reaction, which is to condemn the polite, industrious sister and applaud the presumed lazy one! Today's readings, in a more subtle fashion, continue to subvert our ordinary ways of looking at work, particularly the work we do in the name of God.

God seems to be emphasizing one point repeatedly: You are no more in charge of the work you do in my name than a flower is in charge of its own blooming. This is not your Kingdom; it is mine. I am building it so that you have a place to rest.

In the Gospel passage we read this morning, Mark refers to the disciples as "apostles", for the first and only time. This is interesting to note because it comes from the Greek word meaning "to send"; "apostello". It's Mark's way of communicating that these were official emissaries of Jesus; they had been sent on "official business" and were returning to report back; their mission had a purpose.

Many of us want to be 'sent.' When we are doing the work we were 'meant' to do, we are fully alive. Our gifts are in full bloom, we fire on all cylinders (any metaphor is fine), and it is usually just plain fun. We all know what that feels like. There is a surge of energy and purposefulness. We know we are needed. We feel important.

But inevitably, without rest, we get exhausted. We collapse into bed at night. Suddenly, it is not so much fun.

Let's consider this cycle for a moment. Because it seems to me that if God is determining the nature of the work, God also gets to determine the need for rest. It is very much like a harvest, or a garden. A seed may think, "I LOVE being a flower in full bloom!" but that blossoming can't happen if it doesn't rest, buried beneath soil and snow, inert. At rest.

I think most of us are more like David, we want to be more like flowers in the spring, in continual motion; we take great pride in our creativity and initiative, ever-alert for a new project. We may even be prone to develop a value system based on it: the busier I am, the more important I am. The more I am doing God's work.

David operates within this framework. He says, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." This does not seem right to David! He sees in this discrepancy one more project to do: he wants to build something nicer for God to dwell in. God deserves a nice house, not a little tent. He probably thought God would be thrilled by his initiative.

But God's reply is surprising. God asks David, "[Really?] Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ... [No], the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make *you* a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, and I will establish his kingdom. *He* shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me."

The Lord does not even thank David for his thought! Simply: No, David. Someone else will be doing that job. [And from our post-resurrection perspective, we interpret that someone else to be Jesus.]

Perhaps God's stern rebuke to David's offer finally settled in. Perhaps David in fact rested, and in this place of rest his soul found refreshment. Perhaps in this resting place, he found new delight in his work. Perhaps this is when he realized that he was not the master of his own universe; a realization that actually brought him a great sense of relief. And, perhaps in his stillness, he was finally able to realize the great depth of God's love for him; for us. Perhaps this is when he wrote to God the psalm that has become one of the world's most recognizable, the 23rd:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
    he leads me beside still waters,  
he restores my soul."

[It would be a very different psalm if David wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd and so I have to get back to work but I'm so depleted that I'm collapsed in a pasture by a pond."]

The psalm's author knew his rest was from the Lord, that it did not interfere with God's intentions for him, but rather it fulfilled them. Looking at the natural world around us, it's clear that the cycle of work and rest is part of our Creator's order of things, and humans are not exempt from it.

Whether it's the flowers in our window boxes, the corn in the fields, the leaves on the trees, or our own very lives, none of us can live in perpetual spring; Resting is NOT putting God's work on hold; rest is part of God's work, too. Rest is God's gift to restore our souls.

God's love never sits still. But in order for us to know the depths of this love, we must.