

MAY 4, 2025

On this third Sunday of the Easter Season, let us listen to the words of the post-resurrection apostle Paul, who was renamed after his conversion to the way and teaching of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. These words come from a letter Paul wrote to one of the early Christian churches in the Greek city of Ephesus. Paul sends his prayer and encouragement to these Christians in a passage often called the Apostles' Prayer, as they walked the way of Christ in a new life they found together through faith in Jesus Christ.

Sermon Text The Letter to the Ephesians 3: 14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word. **Thanks be to God!**

SERMON

"A Rhythm of Life: Roots"

Rev. Tessin

Spring is struggling to get here; the minute we think we've finally shifted to the new season – it goes into hiding again! There are other shifts besides weather in the seasons of life that change our routines throughout our human lives. There are some sitting here who have transitioned from a winter home, returning back to Port Huron for the summer. As we start thinking ahead in the next 5-6 weeks to the winding down of the school year, that creates a change in the rhythm of life that school gives to our young people, their parents, their teachers and administrators. As the school year ends, we have a change of rhythm in church activities, as bible studies and Sunday School and circles wrap up. All of these changes throw off the routines and rhythms that undergird our lives. Some of

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those disrupted rhythms give a much needed break - right students and teachers? Others leave us momentarily rudderless, seeking a new way to ground our daily life.

Chaplain Chad shared another big season of life transition – finding a rhythm of life when young people begin moving on from their formerly structured world, stretching their wings and moving into adult routines and responsibilities. For some at SC4, the new rhythm isn't as much physical in a community college setting – they may still be living at home, still part of their familiar family and friend routine; but at the same time, it's different. Chad's role in mentoring during this life change – finding a spiritual rootedness during these disorienting years – is also about finding a way to be grounded during a period of great upheaval.

The slight disorientation that comes with a big shift in seasons and life is mirrored by the season we are in for the church year, the Easter season. Yes – Easter is more than Resurrection Sunday. It is the time of the church year that encompasses the forty days from Jesus' resurrection until he sends the promised Holy Spirit to his disciples on the day of Pentecost. For the disciples, their former life of preaching, teaching and healing physically alongside Jesus had been disrupted. So – what were they to do now? How would they keep Jesus' presence with them in this new season of life?

During the Easter season, we are in another liminal space, a transitional space of waiting but also a space of reorienting, just like the disciples experienced. After the build up, what does life mean post-Easter? How do I feel Christ's presence now in this new season of faith? For these days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday, we're going to explore a spiritual rhythm of life, routines that give our spiritual growth structure.

To help us visualize this, I'm going to follow a metaphor presented by the pastor and writer Ken Shigamatsu, who in his book "God in My Everything" explored the rhythm and routines of a spiritual life through the image of a plant guided and shaped by a trellis. Through this metaphor, or mind picture, Ken painted a way of seeing how we can be open to and part of the Holy Spirit's work to shape us, form us, more and more into the image of Christ. Like Jesus' disciples, we contemporary disciples also need to find our own rhythm of spiritual life. So let's begin with the beginning: the roots. Paul's words to the Ephesians included this hope: "... that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." There are three foundational

practices that root us in love of God and love of neighbor. The first two of these we'll look at today: intentionally creating Sabbath time, and continuing to use scripture to know God's will for us.

The schedules of work and recreation have shifted in the service economy we now live in. More and more people do not have a 9-5, Monday through Friday work routine – work spans a broader part of the day, and can include weekends. This new world of the last 40 years has made the picture of what day of a calendar week must be Sabbath get challenged after centuries. And as many time saving inventions we now have at our disposal – washing machines and dishwashers, microwaves, power tools and GPS instruments, even grocery delivery services! – we struggle even more to hold fast to time spent just glorifying God. Thomas Merton said the most pervasive type of violence we encounter in contemporary society is ... busyness. For every hour or two we save with a new tool meant to "save" time, we add on twice as much "doing" in our lives that takes that open space and refills it to overflowing. And that has flowed into Sundays. The spiritual danger in this? Our busyness often blocks us from seeing and hearing God in our daily lives.

Returning to God's original intent for a "day of rest" in the routine of our life is God's permission to stop creating, stop "doing," intentional letting go of the urge to stay busy and to simply Be. Bask in what God has done and created in our life over the previous days. Reflect on the small miracles that peek out at us when we make ourselves stop, look at our life, and see those moments presented to us in hindsight. Whatever day of the week or time of the day, it was for this purpose: to focus on God, to reconnect with our Creator, to reflect on Jesus' saving work for and in us, to stop the chatter around us and listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance for the coming new week. In Paul's words: "that you may be strengthened in your inner being"; "that Christ may dwell in your hearts." Intentional rest, focused on God, is what is necessary to make that hope become manifest in your lives.

Creating intentional Sabbath time is a major transitional project for a new college student – and a new pastor. To rigidly say Sunday is Sabbath is problematic for those of us whose Sunday is a work day. And what used to be my intentional time with God in my previous work life – reading scripture, giving of my time to the work of the church, reading devotional material – starts bleeding over into what I do for the "work of the church." I had an opportunity to think about this after picking my Epiphany Star Word this year: Reverence. And it may

seem like a redundant word for a “reverend.” But, reflecting on it made me pause and think about how I keep reverence ingrained in the work of the church I am doing. And as a pastor, your Sabbath is my work day, and so I need to find time away in another part of the week away from researching and writing and teaching. And I started learning how to do that in the pandemic. In the year where everything I had work and school and church was online, online worship began to just make it feel like another “work day.” And so I began to go to an outdoor space, off of a hiking trail, on Sunday mornings. I took my journal, my small Bible, some non-school/church work reading, sometimes some music, and just sat and reflected upon my week, how I had seen God acting within my life, ways I had honored God and ways I missed out on what God was trying to do – all while looking out on God’s natural world. Being in God’s creation, changing my routine, was what I unconsciously realized I needed. And when I was sharing this new activity in my week with a seminary friend, with a hint of guilt in my description of this, he said this to me: “I think you have found your ministerial Sabbath in this pandemic practice.” And he was right – intentionally changing my routine for the purpose of stopping to feel God, to see God, to hear God in my life was the creation of a Sabbath. Making sure we include in our life intentional moments of reverence as we go through the tasks and events of our personal lives.

Now you might be thinking – Pastor, what are you doing? You should be encouraging people to be sitting in pews (here in the sanctuary or online), not going for a hike in the woods! And for most of you sitting here, or at home watching our livestream or the recording posted to YouTube later this week, that is what weekly morning worship is – a part of your rhythm of spiritual life that anchors your week, makes you pause, and helps you reflect on God and Christ’s message to us about love of God and neighbor throughout the following week. We honor Sabbath most fully when we gather with God’s people to pray together, sing together, listen to the stories and teachings of Scripture together, and immerse ourselves in the reality of the immense love of God as seen through love of each other. You cannot be a Christian alone; it is meant by Christ’s teaching to be a life lived together. BUT – if your giving heart and deep desire to serve the church ends up turning Sunday into work, then it’s time to think about how much of that Sabbath time has become work, discerning you may need to supplement with time focused solely on God. Looking at a routine that does help you pause, create space for God to do the Holy Spirit’s work within yourself is needed for your ongoing spiritual growth.

And once that space is created in our life, within ourselves, the second practice that roots our spiritual growth is a rhythm of engaging with scripture. The ways we can do this are varied. Being in corporate worship together, singing and reciting and listening to the words and images that come out of a common text you are all experiencing together, in community, is one important way to put scripture into your life. But, it can't really be the only way if you are going to grow fully into a relationship of trust and devotion to God. It also has to be part of your rhythm within the rest of the week.

Many sitting here or in our digital pews through the livestream do have some routine of engaging with scripture outside of the worship setting. Participating in bible, circle and group studies. Preparing Sunday school lessons for the children. Engaging with Advent and Lenten seasonal devotionals. Our devotional booklet ministry is also a way many do this. You might see the Daily Bread and These Days devotional booklets on the table in our parking lot entryway. For some, especially our homebound, it is part of their spiritual rhythm of life.

But there are other things you can do on your own to help support the roots of your spiritual life with scripture. Taking the bulletin home with you, and re-reading the scripture texts through the week, pondering how they are speaking to you personally, how you hear them differently after the interpretation given in the sermon, pausing on words or phrases that are catching your eye or ear. Memorizing a phrase, or at least writing it down, and putting it somewhere you will see regularly – on the refrigerator door, the bathroom mirror, in your car, so that you keep returning to it over and over through the week.

Most importantly, our engagement in a daily practice of scripture should include our own reflection on not just knowing God's Word, but *doing* God's Word. Be careful not to gorge, overeat, scripture. Reading 10 chapters a day trying to get through the Bible in one year may provide a perspective on the scope and breadth of the Bible – I'm not trying to dissuade you from that – but it can fill our minds with a little too much. Too much, and we end up struggling to live it out. Like a post-Thanksgiving dinner, we can become a little spiritually sluggish from too much intake. We need to be cautious that we don't end up on hearing with our minds, but never taking it into our heart – the purpose of this spiritual practice.

In the last couple of days, I realized the time had urgently come to take a plant arrangement that had been given to me in the fall, and break it up, to free up the roots, to give them some new earth to anchor into, to breathe new life into the roots so that the plants above the soil could better flourish. In the repotting, I am recreating the container they live in so that growth can accelerate. That recreated home for the roots gives them the space and nutrients needed to continue flourishing.

Re-creation. That is God's purpose in instructing us to practice Sabbath as the conclusion to God's own creative work in Genesis. And, in the nourishment we're provided in Scripture, we give ourselves food for re-creation. Paul's hope for the Ephesian church, and for us today, is having Christ dwell in our hearts, opening ourselves to letting Christ change us. David's words to his son Solomon from our Chronicles scripture reading, "If you seek him, you will find him," are carried forward by Paul to his instructions to the church in Ephesus. Why do we gather in Jesus' name? Why do we create moments of reverence, Sabbath, in our life? Why do we ground ourselves in Scripture? "... that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." May you feed your own inner being also with these gifts from God. Amen.