

SERMON JUNE 1, 2025

First Reading Luke 24: 44-53 (NRSV)

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, **46** and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day **47** and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things. **49** And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. **51** While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. **52** And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, **53** and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Ephesians 1: 15-23 (NRSV) Paul’s Prayer for the Church in Ephesus

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, **18** so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. **20** God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. **22** And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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

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SERMON “A Rhythm of Life: Restored and Reaching Out”

A life lived following – lived within – God was part of Jesus’ hope for his disciples during his three years of ministry, and it is Jesus’ hope for all of us as his contemporary disciples. In this Eastertide season of the church year, we’ve spent several Sundays pondering how we live within Christ by creating a rhythm of spiritual life that sustains and supports us as we grow more and more into the image of Christ. My devotional reading of Ken Shigematsu’s *God in My Everything*¹ as led to sharing some of his thoughts on spiritual practices to build this rhythm, using the metaphor of a plant growing up a trellis. We started with the roots – Sabbath time focused on God, time deep in Scripture, prayer; then we moved into the support that human connection and relationship gives us in further growing our relationship with God. Today we’ll conclude that exploration, looking at how *restoring* ourselves helps us to *reach out* for and to others, showing them the way to the Son, Jesus Christ.

The relationship between the body, mind and spirit is much better understood in the world of medicine today. But there is still a tendency of thought that things of the body aren’t spiritual, aren’t holy. This line of religious thinking started in the medieval time period, and its diminishing, and even rejecting, of the human body is puzzling – didn’t Christ willing come to us as a flesh-and-blood human being? Our Creator God demonstrates the value of the body – if it is evil, or less important than our spirit, why would God have clothed himself in a human body in Jesus Christ? And the future resurrection of our bodies can be a compelling reason to treat them well in the present. If there is any continuity between our current bodies and our resurrected bodies in the age to come, well – that’s a pretty big incentive to care for them as best we can in the present.

And so a spiritual rhythm of life should also include all the ways we care for our body as well as our spirit. Physically, we honor the body’s created needs by valuing its needs. The gift of sleep and its restorative role in maintaining health; eating mindfully, in a way that gives quality energy to us. Both are ways we can honor God in restoring ourselves.

Another restorative practice that supports us physically and spiritually is allowing ourselves to play. And this is broader than the box that defines play as activity only children engage in. Think of play with a new definition that

¹ Ken Shigematsu, *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013)

differentiates it from work: *play is doing something for its own sake*. Play is any activity that doesn't have an ultimate agenda. Play is something we do not because we're good at it – but because we love it. There is a difference between going out on a boat fishing in the early morning hours relaxing with just a friend or two – versus entering a three day fishing contest for cash prizes. The former is play; the latter becomes work! I have moments of play where for relaxation I sit down and play the piano. I do not play at an advanced level – I'm not a performance artist. But it's a form of play for me – I'm doing it not for pay, not for the purpose, not for performance. I do it just for the joy of creating music. This is the restorative practice of play.

Hopefully each of you has something that is play for you – gardening, hacking around on the golf course, renovating a classic car stored in your garage, exploring a family genealogy, stitching quilts with friends. All of these activities, if done just for the joy of it, can be a form of play. And for our spiritual rhythm of life, play can be a window to God. C.S. Lewis in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, describes creating a tiny garden with his older brother as a child, and remembered feeling a sense of a voice of joy calling him, creating a yearning in him to repeat that encounter through gardening throughout his adult life. He realized as an adult that this voice of joy was God, and it opened up a path that led him to God and a life of faith after a young adulthood as an agnostic. Play can lead us to God, and play can help us contemplate God, by getting us out of our self-absorption, creating contemplative moments that cause us to open our hearts to hearing God's call upon us.

We all have the need to intentionally find ways to physically, emotionally, and spiritually restore ourselves. As we restore ourselves, we create the final growth that creates the flowering of discipleship – reaching outside of ourselves to God and others. The order is important – just like the flight attendants tell us to put on our own oxygen mask before we try to help others, we need to root and restore ourselves before we can begin to help others.

Our daily responsibilities, our work, is part of that reaching out element of our lives. But for a spiritual rhythm of life, we include those responsibilities in our spiritual practices by re-framing them. Sometimes the story of Adam and Eve, and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, can label work as “punishment” for sin. And nothing could be farther from the truth of what God is trying to convey to us through scripture. Before the banishment, before the curses laid upon the life Adam and Eve would live, they were working. In Genesis 2:15 we read: “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take

care of it.” Work is not a curse for sins, but a created part of who we are. When we work, we are co-creating with God. God can do anything and everything without any help from humans – but God chose to co-create with us. The apostle Paul wrote “I planted a seed. Apollos watered it. But God has been making it grow.” Your work in life may not feel particularly spiritual, but you’re still co-creating with God. And it may be the *primary* place of your spiritual formation. Pastor Dallas Willard writes “To not find your jobs, your work, to be the primary place of discipleship is to automatically exclude most of your waking hours of life from God. The gospel turns your work into a spiritual formation training center.” The ancient monastics viewed work as the primary place to grow toward union with God. Whether it was weeding gardens, cooking for others, tending to livestock, caring for the worship space and common areas, and each was an opportunity of service to each other and to God. Work was their way to unite with God and serve the larger community. This isn’t using our work for proselytizing, telling people what they should or shouldn’t do as a part of their faith walk, but it’s thinking of all you do as a gift to God and others is a spiritual practice. It is reaching out by our motivations and orientation to God, by how we act – not just our words.

We conclude examining reaching out by returning to the practice that is accessible to us all – prayer. Ken Shigematsu writes that prayer is more than just a preparation for service to God, more than something that “super charges” us to then do the “real work” of discipleship. *Prayer is the work itself* – it is *the* work of the ministry each of us is called to do. Paul in Ephesians calls us to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions,” (Eph 6:18). Our service to God and neighbor should be grounded in prayer. It is the essential element for spiritual growth.

As I finished my devotional time reading and reflecting on Ken Shigematsu’s thoughts on finding a spiritual rhythm of life in today’s world, I was also sitting with the lectionary scripture passages for this weekend. It never fails to surprise and delight me to see how the Spirit interconnects things. Today, we come to the time in the church year, in the lectionary, where we remember the end of Jesus’ resurrected presence on earth. After Jesus was *restored* into a new way of being – a resurrected body, one the disciples couldn’t completely describe and yet still recognized in flashes of remembrance and insight – Luke tells us Jesus led his followers back to where Holy Week began, to Bethany. Jesus then blessed them and was carried up into heaven. His lifted hands reached up to God; his lifted hands demonstrated the source of the message of love and forgiveness Jesus

tried to instill in these eleven people that watched his final departure from this earthly plane. His ascension was an act of restoration – restoration into his reign at the right hand of the Father God that created us all, restoration to his ultimate glory.

The disciples' final restoration, and the beginning of their reaching out, would come on the day of Pentecost – which we'll celebrate next week. Looking back on the disciples' journey to restoration and reaching out, Paul evokes Christ's final teaching to them in what he prays for the believers in the little church in Ephesus. He prayed: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power." This prayer for that church is echoed through the centuries to us, the Christian church in the 21st century, and to First Presbyterian Church of Port Huron Michigan. The prayers we lift every Sunday in worship; the morning and evening prayers or praying for the church and others you do at home; and the prayers that have been lifted by writing them on the cards last week and today, are following Jesus' teaching – through prayer, we individually and the church universal restore ourselves. We also reach out, as Jesus modeled, through prayer. Through prayer, we use the power of the Holy Spirit freely available to us by Jesus Christ to work *God's* great power.

During our time in our human bodies, we live a new life restored in our relationship with God through our Savior, Jesus. And being restored, we then listen to the call of Christ to reach out, seeing all we do as a gift from, and a gift to, God. To grow in all aspects of our life as a church, prayer is the foundational practice that holds us together, and holds us in union with God. We grow in our faith every day of the life we are given when we nourish the roots of that faith and the flowering that it brings through us through prayer. Jesus prayed for his disciples, as written in the book of John: "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one.... And may they be in us (the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) so that the world will believe you sent me." May prayer of Jesus be answered in the ways our spiritual practices, in the ways our prayers root us, allow us to relate to others, restore us and reach out in Jesus' name. Through

them, may our faith flower, turn our faces continually to the Son, so we may bask in union with God. Amen.