

Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, I will give you rest. — Matthew 11:28



The season of Lent has often been a time when we think about "giving something up"—a holdover from its penitential flavor in the medieval church. But what if we thought less about "giving up" and more about "making room?" In this Lent series, we will find out what it really costs to be so busy. Let us reconnect to an unhurried God.

The theme of this series draws on the need for self-care in order to continue our work of caring for others. It addresses the growing intensity and frenetic pace of life. The series will invite folks to practices of making room, clearing out, slowing down, and prioritizing for the sake of holistic lives. This holistic life involves living with the rhythms that allow us to thrive, finding a balance between work, play, rest, and reflection. Jesus calls his followers to more than just unbridled consumption or production. Rather, the Scriptures see our lives and bodies as gifts that should be nurtured.

— Dr. Marcia McFee, Creator and Visionary, Worship Design Studio



Ash Wednesday: "Busy"

"Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding... And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense God's grace. — Matthew 6:1-6

In this 21st century world many of us have come to believe, however subconsciously, that being "busy" is what is required of us and ultimately what makes us a good person. But perhaps we've forgotten that God isn't looking for humans to "perform" as if we must earn God's love (or anyone's love) through succumbing to a faster pace for more productivity in order to be "worthy." How can we be "simply and honestly" present in this Lent season? We begin by repenting or "turning around" from unrealistic expectations and false beliefs.

Lent 1: "The Right Tempo"

Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." — Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus never promised that the yoke would literally be "easy." This is a mistranslation. In this context of yoking oxen, the translation means "well fitting." As we begin our "Busy" series, we discover that each of us has a tempo that fits well, that energizes us. What tempo gives you life and energy?

Lent 2: "Preparing a Table"

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. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. — Psalm 23

The Twenty-third Psalm is a great comfort to us as we imagine the green pastures and still waters. It also recalls the dark valleys and calls us into the not-so-easy practice of sitting down at the table with our enemies. An unhurried God is present with us in the good times and in the difficult time and invites us to be radically present to each other in the same way. Have we been too busy to be really present to one another?

Lent 3: "Tuning In"

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; she she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." — Luke 10:38-42

Martha was busy. Mary chose to be still, to tune in to Jesus. The lesson here is not that it is bad to work, but that we also need times of connection to God. Tuning in to the holy may mean just taking time to notice things that are beckoning to dwell with us a while. What contemplative practices can feed and nourish our active lives?

Lent 4: "Living Light"

"Don't chase after what you will eat and what you will drink. Stop worrying. All the nations of the world long for these things... Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Abba delights in giving you the kin-dom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out — a treasure in heaven that never runs out. No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too." — Luke 12:29-34

No one, at the end of their life, would say, "I should have spent more time at the office." And yet many of us live with the tyranny of measuring-up that keeps us weighed down. Lightening the load of expectations and "shoulds" is one way to lighten up as well as to literally lighten the clutter that crowds out our serenity. How do we create space to flourish in the ways God intends?

Lent 5: "A Time for Every Matter"

"For everything, there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil." — Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

For many of us in this modern, industrial, tech-savvy world, we have lost touch with the seasonality of life. We want what we want, when we want it. We come to believe that no time is off limits and the lines between busy and rest, work and play, have become

increasingly blurred. How far are we from the rhythms and "pleasure of our toil?" What cost to ourselves, to our relationships, and to our planet is this frantic pace?

Lent 6: "Give it a Rest"

"Remember the sabbath and keep it holy." — Exodus 20:8

"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." — Mark 2:21-28

The commandment to keep the sabbath is one that might not seem as important as the one about not murdering. But what, and who, suffers in our society when we value economic security over well-being? As we give witness yet again to the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, proclaiming justice for the oppressed, we must also proclaim justice and peace... and rest... for the weary of this world.

Holy Week: "Reconnecting to an Unhurried God"

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you... I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another..." — John 13: 12-35

At the Last Supper, Jesus was doing and saying things that he knew would be his last. How would we spend our time if we knew there was not much of it left? This Holy Week worship experience will be one that can be done at homes in small groups or together at the church. It will make space for guided conversation and stories, food and reflection—a time of naming and claiming the most important things of life.

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