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Sabbatical Gratitudes and The Nap Ministry
II Corinthians 4:1-3, 7-12, 16-18

As many of you know, I am getting ready to head out on a three-month sabbatical from my work here at CMCL – for June, July and August. Although today isn't technically my last Sunday – I will be here next Sunday as part of the candidating weekend for our potential Admin Pastor, Leslie Homer-Cattell.

So, before digging in to the sermon, let me first say how grateful I am that this is a congregation that believes in sabbaticals, and that provides them for their pastors! You may not know it, but CMCL follows the Mennonite Church USA recommendations for sabbaticals, which is: every fourth year of full-time ministry, a pastor gets a three-month sabbatical.

It is humbling to stand before you, knowing that each one of you well deserve a sabbatical from your labors, and very few occupations or employers provide one

and yet your support of this congregation is allowing me to have just that sabbatical.

So, thank you. Truly.

These last two years have been stressful ones here. While we made a very deliberate decision to not immediately hire a second pastor following Chad Martin's resignation (and for the record, I was a big supporter of us taking time to really discern as a congregation what we want from and expect of our pastors at this time), it's taken longer than any of us thought it would, for lots of reasons, some foreseeable, some not. I don't think any of us thought we'd be looking at a 2-year gap! Least of all me.

So it feels like I'm sliding into home base a little more tired and worn-out than I would have liked as this sabbatical approaches

I am grateful beyond measure for the colleagues that I gained two years ago – Amanda and Malinda. They have been inspiring to me, as I've seen them take on the work of pastoring and leading our children's programming and they've been a tremendous support to me – loyal and insightful and caring and challenging. And to Rod and Rachel, who have just continued carrying the day-to-day maintenance of our church with warmth and good spirit (mostly!) and perhaps more independence than they would have preferred.

I'm so grateful to Deb Napolitan for stepping up into the vacant Pastoral Team chair role, and to all of Pastoral Team for their support of me, and sharing of the work.

And the committees that have gone on with their work with much less pastoral support than they ought to have had these two years –

to: Marty Kelley and PAX JC,

Linda Berger, Amelia Rauser and Small Group committee

Verna Miller, who also stepped into a vacant chair position, and Worship Committee

Michael Eby-Good and Hospitality

Ron Umble and Dave Lutz and Lamar Weaver and Facilities

Sherry Groff and Adult Christian Education
Phil Weaver and Finance
Gerald Ressler and now Janet Lind and Staff Relations
Lamar Weaver and now Larry Groff and Council

All the folks who continue running sound,
and finding folks to play prelude & offertory
and organizing the library
and the Parrot Gallery
and too many things and people to name

I'm tired, but it's not because I didn't have help!

I think my biggest insecurity and regret is that it's been hard to feel like an adequate pastoral caregiver these two years. Thankfully, you have cared for each other in many ways, and I thank for your grace with me for the times I have not been present with you.

So, this morning, I chose a scripture that speaks to me as I stand on the brink of sabbatical, and one that I think has a message for all of us, no matter our work schedules this summer.

I love this image of ourselves, our bodies/our lives, as clay vessels for treasure. But the GIF that kept playing in my mind, as I thought of them involved a clay jar toppling from a shelf and shattering – re-playing over and over. An object both very strong, but also fragile. I may not be an expert in 1st century pottery, but I think I can safely say these were not Rubbermaid or Tupperware.

One biblical archaeology resource said that thousands of 1st century clay jars with treasure in them have been excavated in that part of the world in recent years they're called "coin hoards."

"The size of these hoards ranges from fifty to fifty thousand coins. The coins were buried in clay jars for safe keeping, often in times of warfare or instability. Coins were also hoarded for ritual purposes as votive offerings. The phenomenon was so well known that Jesus told a parable about a man who found such a hoard and sold all his possessions to buy the field (Matthew 13:44). The Greek word for "treasure" (thesaurus) used by Jesus is the same word that Paul used in 2 Corinthians 4:7." (1)

So, it's possible that this is what the writer of II Corinthians is referring to with this "treasure in clay vessels."

But this passage also has so many images exhorting the reader to live the very opposite of a buried life: "Do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God."

All in the same passage, two very differing postures are assumed: that it is both completely natural to hoard/hide/bury/protect a vulnerable treasure, but also that the hoped-for movement is toward revelation vs

hiddenness, guilelessness vs cunning, openness and visibility to the sight of God. A hope that we might risk letting our treasure see the light of day.

Putting our clay jars aside for the moment, you may be wondering about today's sermon title. What is "nap ministry?" and what in the world does it have to do with sabbaticals or clay jars?

Well, I didn't make up the phrase, "Nap Ministry." It's already a thing, a movement, and this movement even has a bishop, the founder and self-proclaimed Nap Bishop, Tricia Hersey writes:

I believe that naps provide a space for us to invent, imagine and heal... We are able to lay down our weary souls and offer our bodies and minds over to a sleep state. During this state, when the veil between the Earthly world and the spiritual world is thin, real healing can happen.

I am overwhelmed and struck by how much our bodies desperately want us to heal. The outside influences of society and our own selves fight this healing with a vengeance. Naps can help us ... wake up refreshed and with new insight into a problem.

As an artist, I have awakened from a nap with poetry and ideas spilling from my mind. I would keep a notepad next to my bed for moments like this. I never want to forget that naps are spiritual practice that we must practice regularly for its benefits. This is one of the reasons I started The Nap Ministry – to create physical space for us to nap and heal together.

I received the beginning inspiration for this project while reading slave narratives during archival research. I was obsessed with finding out the smallest details of plantation life. What time did they wake up? Where did they sleep? ... How far were the fields from the sleeping quarters? Did they have lunch breaks? What time would they begin work? When would the work end? (I discovered that most enslaved Africans on cotton plantations worked 20 hours a day) ... Did they ever nap?

I discovered my obsession for details was a way for me to connect with my ancestors. I would go to bed dreaming of them... I imagined that if I could connect with them in the spiritual realm, I could rest for all the centuries they couldn't. I was desperate to provide a form of reparations for them. I will never forget the DREAM SPACE that was stolen. The Nap Ministry is for remembrance.

Rest via napping is vital for every human being, and as I have developed this project I am learning how sleep deprived our entire nation truly is. We are depressed, sick, anxious and disconnected, yet we continue to freely give our bodies and minds over to the grind of capitalism. We have tied our entire worth as human beings into how much we can produce financially. We are killing ourselves by openly being bamboozled by a society that tells us napping is lazy and unproductive. I want you to RESIST. I want you to free yourself. I want you to nap. I want you to dream. There is healing waiting for you. There is a vision space waiting for you to enter into via rest. This is holy work. Join me there. How will you resist? (2)

Napping! Who knew? It sounds like we missed out on a significant spiritual practice in our Lenten series this spring! In all seriousness, though, this felt like subversive stuff. Almost pornographic. Napping is not productive. It's something you get caught doing. For a people who so value productivity, napping can feel like "idleness," which is a bad word, right?

Anita Amstutz, in her book, *Soul Tending: Journey Into the Heart of Sabbath*, recorded this quote: "Idleness is not just a vacation, an indulgence or a vice; it is as indispensable to the brain as Vitamin D is to the

body, and deprived of it we suffer a mental affliction as disfiguring as rickets. The space and quiet that idleness provides is a necessary condition for standing back from life and seeing it whole ..." (3)

So, to find The Nap Ministry, which blesses napping and rest, and invites others to practice it in an almost evangelical way ... well, wow.

The Nap Ministry both holds events where someone is napping as installation art and provocation, because "the act of watching a black woman rest is a revolutionary act," but also folks not just to witness, but to join in by bringing their own blankets or mats and napping themselves. Sometimes the events are especially aimed at activists, who are often poorly paid, if paid at all, or who do their activism in addition to paid labor.

In pondering this ministry, it struck me that there's another continuum, in addition to the continuums from II Corinthians about being buried vs being revealed. I think in our modern times, the necessary balance to "wokeness," might very well be napping

I have spent the last I-don't-even-know-how-many years trying desperately to get "woke," be "woke," stay "woke" in a way that feels impossible to sustain. (If "woke" is a new term to you, here's how Merriam-Webster defines it: "aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)."

But if you stop and think about it, we all know that one of the worst enemies of biological wakefulness is actually lack of sleep. How odd is that, if you think about it? You'd think not sleeping would lead you to becoming an expert in wakefulness. But no, wakefulness and sleep feed each other.

So, perhaps napping is necessary for maintaining "woke-ness," too ...

One sleep researcher talked about the importance of "distributed sleeping," apparently that's the technical term for napping. In addition to a good night's rest, distributed sleeping allows your body to really download your recent experiences and consolidate them into your memory. (4)

So, to gather up these metaphor fragments and give them a whole: this sabbatical for me feels like both an opportunity for a good night's sleep – a long rest, a chance to bury my hoard and allow the sturdy arms of the earth to hold up the walls of my fragile clay jar for awhile.

But what I'm really hoping for, is to take this time to learn how to nap. To learn how to distribute sleep and rest in my life, to maintain my health, my wakefulness, and my "woke"-ness. For me, this sabbatical will also be about learning how to better do Sabbaths – those small sabbaticals we are invited to take every week.

And here's where my invitation to you, as well: You might not be getting the sabbatical, or the long sleep, that I'm about to get. But I wish for you that you would work on building in naps into your life – be they literal or figurative. That you, too, would give yourself permission to distribute rest more lavishly and regularly and frequently throughout your life. To sustain your labors, your vocations, your waking hours, your activism and yes, your "woke"-ness.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

But we have this treasure in clay jars – So, take care of your jar! I'll be working on taking care of mine, too.

- (1) Mark Wilson. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/artifacts-and-the-bible/treasures-in-clay-jars/>
- (2) Tricia Hersey, Nap Bishop, The Nap Ministry. January 5, 2018. <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>
- (3) Tim Kreider, from *We Learn Nothing*, quoted in Anita Amstutz's book. p. 70.
- (4) Elijah Wolfson, "Why Some People Respond to Stress by Falling Asleep: Fight, Flight or Sleep." *The Atlantic*. December 26, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/12/why-some-people-respond-to-stress-by-falling-asleep/282422/>