#### 2/23/25 Sunday Message

#### The Spiritual Power of Rest

#### Rev Nina Clark

There’s a saying attributed to Hunter S. Thompson, that goes like this: “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, 'Wow! What a ride!”

When I first heard that quote, I was totally onboard with arriving at the end of my days having wrung every drop of life and adventure out of living. What an exciting life that would have to be!

And I think like for most of us, this quote painted for me the picture that a full life is a busy life, full to the brim, not a moment that isn’t filled with doing something! Work! Adventures! Travel! I envisioned a slide into home base, covered in dirt and sweat and the bruises of a life well and fully lived.

Work hard, play hard fits in well with our American culture of busyness. We talk often about our overfull plates, our long workdays, our crammed schedules and we do so with a sense of pride.

We are doers. And we feel if we’re not doing something then we’re wasting time. If we’re not doing something we feel restless, inadequate, like we’re doing something wrong.

Our workdays are long, often bleeding into our evenings and weekends. And when we’re not at work there’s laundry, grocery shopping, meals, house cleaning and yard maintenance.

And for those of us with children, add in after school activities and parent teacher conferences, all of it conspiring to keep us in constant motion until we fall into bed, exhausted, only to get up and repeat it all over again the next day.

Our culture glorifies being overworked. Productivity is often equated with worthiness, and we can fall into the trap of believing that our value is in direct proportion to our busyness.

We have been convinced that our overfull schedules give us greater value and are testaments to our worth. And so, we keep our plates full to overflowing.

Some of us keep our schedules full in order to avoid emotions we would rather not face. Or we feel that if we don’t fill every waking hour with work, we won’t be able to make financial ends meet.

I know that this has been true for me. I have used busyness as a way to feel a sense of worth. I have used busyness as a way to avoid difficult feelings.

And I have felt that if I didn’t fill every waking hour with productive activity that I was less than those who were more productive than I.

Even our vacations, which most of us think of as a time of rest, are filled to the brim with activities. We start our holiday mornings with a caffeinated beverage, get on this bus, take that tour, go to this location and then that location, and then end the day with an alcoholic beverage or three and call it rest.

How many of us return home from our vacations saying that we need a vacation from our vacation? We return home exhausted, with a mountain of laundry to do and a pile of work waiting for us that didn’t get done while we were away. There is nothing wrong with vacationing like this, it just isn’t rest.

Surrounded by this kind of cultural conditioning, it’s nearly impossible to think that rest has any real value. Real rest feels indulgent. Rest feels like a luxury rather than a necessity.

“Rest is not what most people think it is,” says Rubin Naiman, a sleep specialist and clinical assistant professor of medicine at the University of Arizona’s Center for Integrative Medicine.

“People confuse rest with recreation, doing things like hiking, watching movies, gardening, reading, or even inebriation—getting high, stoned, tipsy, or drunk. Any of these activities can only be termed restful because they are breaks from work.” But taking a break from work does not necessarily equal rest.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, in his book Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less, writes, “Lots of people treat rest as a completely mindless or passive thing. At the end of the day they head to happy hour; on the weekends they go clubbing; on holiday they travel to tropical countries where it’s always happy hour and the clubs are always open.“

We’re discovering that rest is so important that, as Amelia Nagoski, co-author of Burnout, writes, “Get rest or the rest is going to get you. If your body has to make you feel like garbage in order to force you to rest, it’s going to do that.”

I spoke to a woman the other day who gets sick every time she returns from vacation. Perhaps it’s the only way she can actually get rest.

About ten years ago rest got me. Anyone have the experience of the universe forcing you to come to a full stop?

I’d been given my warning signs, a whisper here and there that something needed to change. But I was living the full life! I was making sure everyone’s needs around me were met. I was doing all the things - working, taking care of my aging parents, parenting, partnering.

And you know, busyness begets busyness and before we know it our feet are going so fast in the hamster wheel that we feel that we don’t have time to do anything but continue the race. We are energizer bunnies zooming around banging our drums heading this way and that.

And so my body literally forced me to stop. I was burning my life candle at both ends and my energizer battery ran dry.

Because we teach that our thoughts create our world of experience, it has been misinterpreted to mean that illness is bad, and we are doing something wrong if we get sick. I don’t look at it that way.

After all, if Phineas Quimby, father of New Thought teachings hadn’t been sick and the doctors of his time unable to offer him a cure, he would have never been motivated to search in another direction.

If Unity co-founder Myrtle Fillmore hadn’t been sick with TB and also sought wholeness because the medical community at the time couldn’t offer her anything, Unity would never have come into being.

If Frederick Bailes hadn’t had diabetes before there was a medical cure for it, he would have never discovered the spiritual principles that led to his healing.

And so I believe that it’s highly possible that when we as soul are trying to express a fuller version of ourselves, and we can’t hear ourselves through the trappings of our limiting beliefs and the loud clamoring of the outer world, we will sit ourselves down in whatever way we can so that we have a better possibility of hearing.

And that was true for me with my brick wall hard stop. I was forced to rest and in doing so, I got in touch with some very important insights and obstacles to my own spiritual growth that changed my life for the better.

But there is a better way than the brick wall method. And while different researchers are calling it different things, I like the phrase, “deliberate rest.”

“We live in a culture that perpetuates the belief that when we have a lot going on and a lot of excitement, we’re really alive,” says Anne LeClaire, author of Listening Below the Noise. “In truth,” she continues, “we are really alive when we can be at peace within our own skin.”

Isn’t that a bit of a 180? “In truth, we are really alive when we can be at peace within our own skin.”

It turns out that rest is vital to our well-being, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It turns out that rest is a spiritual power.

And so if rest is not vacations, is not about taking a break from work, is not about escapism, is not about getting more sleep at night, what is rest? Other than going to bed earlier, most of us have no clue how to rest.

Rest means different things to different people. Ultimately it refers to whatever restores or renews or reinvigorates you. Saundra Dalton-Smith, in her book Sacred Rest, identifies seven types of rest because we can feel depleted in different areas of our lives.

Those seven types of rest are Physical, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual, Social, Sensory, and Creative.

Saundra writes, “All rest is not created equal. Much of what we consider rest fails to work because it is not restful. Shifting our activities or changing the location of where we are active is no more restful than doing those same activities at home.

“The most effective rest occurs when we are purposefully reviving the parts of our life we regularly deplete. Any so-called rest that does not meet this goal isn’t rest; it’s just more work adding to the busyness.”

Rest is described as a time when our bodies are relatively relaxed, and our mind is free to wander. We’re not trying to create a to do list, or solve a problem, or worry about some situation in our life.

When this happens, a whole different part of the brain gets lit up and new dots are connected paving the way for new associations and inspiration without us trying to direct traffic.

How many of us think that sitting and staring into space is a constructive use of our time? Turns out that it totally is. This is a form of rest.

How many of us think that taking a walk and thinking about absolutely nothing, just taking in the trees or plants around us is a constructive use of our time? Turns out that it totally is. This is another form of rest.

How about throwing a pot on a potter’s wheel? Rest. Anything that absorbs our attention while allowing the body to stay relatively relaxed and the mind to wander are constructive uses of our time because this is how we rest.

That seems counter-intuitive for most of us, because we are programmed to think of idleness as an indulgence or a distraction from what we “should” be doing. But research is showing that pursuing random moments of “unproductive” time might be a lot more productive than we think.

You’ve heard of circadian rhythms (patterns related to 24-hour, night-and-day cycles) and how our bodies are tuned to those?

There is also another type of rhythm called ultradian rhythms, which are patterns that occur many times throughout the day. One of those patterns regulate natural fluctuations of activity and rest, exertion and recovery.

Ernest Rossi, an expert on ultradian rhythms, writes that human beings are literally biologically programmed to want to take 20-minute breaks after every 90 minutes of intense focus or activity.

When we give ourselves this rest break, it gives our conscious mind a break and allows for the subconscious mind to make connections that can reveal new insights.

But why do I say that rest is a Spiritual Power?

For me, when I am not rested, it is hard for me to feel joy. Actually, it’s hard for me feel much of anything besides tired and drained and a bit numb. When I am not rested, insights and inspiration don’t rise to the surface… I feel separate from Life, heavy and sluggish.

But when I practice intentional rest, joy bubbles to the surface quite regularly. I feel at peace, vibrant and alive. The world around me feels alive and I feel at one with and in love with so much of Life. I can more easily see God in the eyes of all with whom I share this amazing planet. I have more patience.

When I practice intentional rest, I hear the still small voice more readily because the noise in my head isn’t so loud and all consuming.

“Rest also leaves room for uncomfortable emotions to surface. “It often takes us right into painful feelings of grief, shame, and rage,” Ashley Neese, author of Permission to rest, notes.

“Until we can meet ourselves in the discomfort that surfaces when we rest, we will continue resisting the medicine we desperately need,” she explains.

This is relevant to our spiritual growth, for as we’ve talked about before, these feelings need to complete their cycle in order to release the bound energy they hold. These feelings are between us and fuller revelation of our spiritual nature.

Deliberate rest allows us to set a trap for spiritual insight. We can’t force insights, but we can set the table and make the invitation.

These insights may be about the next step in our spiritual unfoldment - a divine inspiration if you will - or they might be an insight about a place that we are stuck and that clarity allows us to integrate or release that old pattern so we are free to expand and reveal more of our divine identity.

Saundra Dalton-Smith, in her book Sacred Rest, writes, “Sleep is solely a physical activity. Rest, however, penetrates into the spiritual. Rest speaks peace into the daily storms your mind, body, and spirit encounter. Rest is what makes sleep sweet.”

Jeshua Ben Joseph taught us the importance of rest as a spiritual power. In Mark 6:31, he tells his disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

Rest is also an act of faith. It requires us to trust that we do not have to hold everything together by our own efforts. How often do we push ourselves to exhaustion, believing that if we stop, everything will fall apart?

Yet, when we look at nature, we see that rest is built into the divine order. Trees have seasons of dormancy before they bloom again. The ocean has moments of stillness between its waves. Even our breath has a rhythm—inhale, pause, exhale, pause.

When we rest, we affirm that we trust the divine flow of life. We acknowledge that we are not solely responsible for making everything happen. We surrender to a greater wisdom that is always guiding, supporting, and sustaining us.

Deliberate rest allows us to create the environment for inspiration to occur. And it can help us to avoid the brick wall method.

So, how might we ignite the spiritual power of rest in our daily lives? Here are a few simple ways.

Create Sacred Pauses throughout your day, every ninety minutes if you’re able, even taking just five minutes to relax and let your mind just wander.

At the end of your workday, rather than turning on the television, take five to twenty minutes to sit outside in nature or take walk allowing your body and mind to decompress and your thoughts to meander.

Listen to Your Body. When you feel fatigued, overwhelmed, or uninspired, honor those signals. They are divine invitations to rest and renew.

If you’re one to unwind with an alcoholic beverage at the end of the day, before you do, take ten minutes to just zone out. Don’t think about your day, or what you have to do in the evening, just rest for ten minutes.

And don’t tell yourself you don’t have the time to rest. You do.

In spite of what our American culture tells us, rest is not a luxury; it is a sacred necessity. When we allow ourselves to rest, we are not being lazy—we are being wise by aligning with the divine rhythm of life, making space for Spirit to work in and through us.

Getting rest doesn’t mean that we don’t live a full life, sliding into homebase “loudly proclaiming, 'Wow! What a ride!” It means that we get to be more fully present as we’re living that full life, more able to appreciate all of its nuances and gifts.

I invite you to give it a try. Over the next month give yourself permission to rest and notice what happens. Trust that as you rest, you are paving the way for insights and a deeper feeling of wholeness and peace.