

Resistance to Multitasking
Amos 8:4-12; Matthew 6:24
Lent 5
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This week's sermon is the last in the "official" sermon series based on Walter Brueggemann's book, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Next week, we will remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as we celebrate Palm Sunday and begin Holy Week. However, I hope to continue to look at the biblical theme of Sabbath, even in the midst of the busyness of Holy Week. Certainly, Holy Week lends itself to some reflection on resistance to the "culture of now" that surrounds us, and how the last week of Jesus' life reflected his resistance to the culture that surrounded him and his disciples.

This week we turn to Resistance to Multitasking. I have to admit, in my own life I have generally seen the ability to multitask as a positive thing. Sure, like many people, there have been times that in my efforts to do more than one thing at a time, I have done both things poorly. But, for the most part, I feel like I am pretty effective while multitasking. For your entertainment, however, I will provide an example of my own epic multitasking failure.

Here's the thing, it doesn't matter how early I get going in the morning, I think I ought to have been leaving the house sooner than I did. Because of this, I often start working before I leave the house. It is not uncommon for me to be on a work-related phone call as I'm leaving the house in the morning. And this is how that looks...I'm on the phone, putting on my coat, putting my laptop in its case, gathering all of my work-related papers and books, the calendar, and I'm talking to...one of you. I get things packed up, grab my purse, check to be sure my keys are in my purse. I'm all ready to go...except...I can't find my phone. Where did I put it? I use it as an alarm clock and I'm awake, so I had it

then. It's not in the bedroom. It's not in the kitchen or by the chair in the living room. Where...oh, wait...

I wish I could tell you this has only happened once.
And I wish I could tell you this is the only multitasking failure that comes to mind when I think of my own efforts to do and be more.

Multitasking is often not in our best interest.
In his book, *Sabbath as Resistance*, Walter Brueggemann writes, "Multitasking is the drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness." He says, "Such practice yields a divided self, with full attention given to nothing."

Sometimes life has a way of forcing us to multitask, though. There has been a lot of attention given to one particular "multitasking" dad. Have you seen the video of the dad who apparently works from home and was being interviewed for a national news story, from what appeared to be his home office? Take a look.

BBC did a parody showing how that might have been different if the dad had been a mom. Here it is.

I don't believe a sweeping generalization can be made about whether men or women are better at multitasking. We are probably, in the end, all equally good or bad at it, depending on how it's framed. What I do know is that there are times in life when multitasking is **not** a good thing.

On Wednesday, this should have been clear to anyone who heard of the accident in Texas involving a pickup truck and a church bus caring senior citizens returning from a retreat. 13 people were killed and 2 people were injured. One witness at the scene claims the driver said he was texting while driving. If that is true, that was a costly text

conversation. My heart breaks for the families who have lost people they love, for the church that I am certain is reeling this morning as they remember where each of their members sat. And my heart breaks for the driver of the pickup. He didn't set out to cause the deaths of 13 people that day. I have to wonder what about that conversation was so important. What was it that made him certain the person on the other end couldn't wait? Yes, there are times multitasking has serious consequences.

The author of Amos tells us that one of those times is during Sabbath keeping.

⁴ Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,

⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,

so that we may offer wheat for sale?

We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,

⁶ buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat."

⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

⁸ Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,

and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

⁹ On that day, says the Lord GOD,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.

¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;

I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day.

¹¹ The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD,
when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.

¹² They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD,
but they shall not find it.

This passage is addressing people who are supposed to be practicing Sabbath...you know, resting, allowing their neighbors to rest, dialing back their anxiety, focusing on connecting with God and one another, all of the things we have talked about in the last few weeks. Instead, they are multitasking...they can't wait to get to the next thing. Maybe they, like some of us, are sitting in church, watching the clock, thinking about where to go for lunch and what must be done that afternoon. Brueggemann writes, "All the while they keep Sabbath, they are in fact, in their imaginations, buying and selling and trading and bargaining. The appearance is one of rest, but says the poet, the social reality is one of restlessness, for the pattern of acquisitiveness is not interrupted, even on the day of rest."

And it gets worse, not only are the people not really interrupting their rat race culture, they are plotting ways to take advantage of their neighbors, "We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, ⁶ buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." You can almost hear the diabolical laughter of a super villain...Mwahahahahaha. The people the author of Amos is talking

about here are, on the Sabbath, making a plan to cheat their neighbors by unfairly exchanging money and goods. Imagine sitting in worship thinking about how you can borrow your neighbor's lawn mower and siphon all the gas out of it before returning it. Or going home on Sunday afternoon and making the agenda for a meeting on Monday where you will be telling the employees you supervise that they will need to work weekends until this latest project is up and running.

Brueggemann writes, "Everything has become a commodity; and there are no more neighbors!" And his very blunt point: "A society that refuses Sabbath restfulness *for all* is bound to fail." Indeed, the author of Amos promises hunger, thirst, mourning, separation from God. The same is true for us...it is not our excessive production, anxiety, coercive systems, and exclusive rules that will ultimately fulfill us and bring about the realm of God here. It is lives lived with mindsets of the importance of Sabbath. It is coming face to face with our own beautiful, wonderful limitations and frailties, and believing we are enough...our neighbors are enough. It is coming face to face with God and acknowledging that, in all things, God's love for us is enough. And, this too, is the message of Jesus.

According to the author of Matthew, Jesus warned against multitasking, especially when it comes to our relationship with God. "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). We can't serve God and wealth. Or God and our own egos. Or God and our fears. And that is Sabbath's reminder to us and to the world. Our way of being ought to be different. We ought to be different...different than the world, but mostly, different than we were last year, a few weeks ago, even yesterday. Transformation begins here.

As I look back on my own experiences, I am aware that there were moments I spent multitasking that I wish I had back. How about you? Have there been times when worrying and anxious productivity caused you to miss life? Have you had the experience of looking back and thinking you would have enjoyed this or that more if you hadn't been so worried about something else at the same time? I don't think it's a coincidence that right after Jesus' message of not serving two masters, he said, "Do not worry..."

So, here's my advice:

Put down your phone and your Ipad. Turn off your TV and radio. Sit in your favorite spot, either at home or wherever you are the most comfortable. Sit with someone you love or all by yourself. And try this.

Close your eyes for a moment.

Take a deep breath in. "Quiet me, God of Life."

Now exhale deeply. "Dwell with me."

Again, breath in deeply. "Quiet me, God of Life."

And exhale, "Dwell with me."

If you have closed your eyes open them. If you were in your favorite spot, you might consciously breathe deeply in and out many times, until you feel yourself relax into a spirit of deep focus...connecting with your own thoughts and feelings, with your surroundings, with God. This exercise is called a breath prayer. It is an ancient spiritual practice that, for me, has been helpful in drawing me into *monotasking*, focusing on one thing. God. The words can be said out loud, sung, chanted, or said silently within. And they can be whatever you want. Call God the name you prefer. Begin and end in whatever way is comfortable for you. I've heard that breath prayers can be the closest thing we have to "praying without ceasing." We have to breathe, so the potential for a breath prayer is always there.

And the same is true for moments of Sabbath. While the intention of the biblical theme of Sabbath is to interrupt our busyness for a full day, Sabbath practice must be woven into our everyday. We must do whatever we have to do resist the things that separate us from one another and from God. And like the ancient Israelites whom we have journeyed with the last few weeks, the things that divide us are our own doing. We choose the restlessness of our “culture of now” over the restfulness of Sabbath which God has called us to from the first moments of creation.

God breathed life into us and into this world. Let us continue to be the breath of life in the lives of each other and our neighbors.

May the gift of Sabbath be yours today and every day.

Amen.