

Imagine Rest and Rest to Imagine  
Matthew 11:28-30  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
November 10, 2024  
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

It was a quiet morning, a rare morning when the alarm was not set and the entire household was breathing the relaxed breaths of sleep. If you looked closely around the edges of the shades, you could see the light beginning to come through. But, on this slow morning, when he didn't have to sit straight up and dive into the to-do list, there was room to slow down, there was room for imagination.

In those moments, along with the stretch of his arms, the slow flutter of his eyelids, the wiggle of his toes, he felt the possibility. The day was ripe with it. Not having to jump right up and plow into the activities of the day gave him space to wonder, to imagine, to embrace new possibilities. He got out of bed that morning, not burdened by his schedule, but awash with hope.

Friends, rest is important in so many ways. We know that. We talk about it. In fact, we talk about it more than we do it. But when we do it, we experience that we are healthier and happier if we are well rested. Our bodies, and the bodies of all creatures, run with the rhythms of night and day, of resting and being awake.

But rest is not only about our physical being. Rest is also essential to our imagination. And our imagination is essential to our lives and our communities.

See, it is hard to imagine anything different when we are so busy rushing from one commitment to the next.

It is difficult to see the possibilities of what-might-be when what-is has us tied to a hamster wheel of activity.

Rest gives us the space, whether in our dream state or simply by slowing down, the space to imagine, to wonder, to embrace new possibilities.

Friends, we are talking about this idea of imagining together - imagining things like wholeness and healing, imagining rest and vitality. We are talking about this as part of our stewardship emphasis. So, we are talking about this in the context of looking ahead at the ministries to which we are called in the coming year and

asking how each of us will participate in them, how we will support them with our money, with our time, with our giftedness.

And, if we're honest, too often we don't bring much imagination to this process. Whether it be at this time of year when we are looking at the new year's budget and anticipating a change of calendar, or whether it be any time throughout the year...most of the time we are doing things because they need to be done or giving money because we are part of the community, but often without much thought to a bigger picture or a growing vision.

We sign up to serve as a greeter or a communion server on Sunday because we are capable and those jobs need to be done, because we enjoy doing them. We put money in the offering box or set up automatic payments for our offering because we are part of the congregation and believe in the ministry we do together. Some of us are just pragmatic enough about all of this that we know that light bills need to be paid and payroll needs to be met. Sometimes, whether with our financial giving or other ways we participate, we do so with more practical things in mind, similar to how we pay our household bills or take care of our household chores.

*And* every dollar you give and every ministry you participate in is appreciated.

But, as we anticipate Commitment Sunday, as we each prayerfully consider the ways that we will participate in the ministry that happens at and through First Christian Church in the coming year, we are really asking you to open up the space of imagination *and* to help us do that together as a congregation.

We are asking you to really slow down and to find a quiet and prayerful space to ask questions about how you are called to be present in this congregation, and about how we - as a congregation - are called to be present in the world.

And then, from that place of rest and imagination, we invite you to make your commitments.

This past week you received a letter from our Treasurer, Karen, and a copy of our narrative budget. In those documents you heard that the cost of continuing to do ministry, largely in the ways that we have been doing ministry, is about \$350,000 for the coming year. That includes paying our staff, taking care of our building from paying utilities to mowing the lawn to doing some updates...that includes supporting our children and youth through worship and youth groups

and family activities and camps and retreats...that includes reaching out into our community with care through connections with helping organizations and our presence in places like Pridefest...it includes a long list of things that have been and are important to being the church together.

And, meanwhile, it is not an all-inclusive list of possibilities.

Because, when we rest and create space for imagining, what we will discover is that our call is broader than we ever knew. What we will discover is that our impact can be more than we might have assumed. What we will discover is that we are called together not just to spend this one hour in worship on Sundays or to sustain the church as it has always been, but we are called together to imagine something more and to live more fully as God's people.

Now, I will acknowledge that maybe some of you hear me say that and are not sure you want to be part of it. After all, we all have a lot going on. We have commitments in our workplaces and our families, the organizations with which we volunteer and our neighborhoods - we have full days and busy calendars. Add to that the generalized stress of day-to-day living amidst fear and polarization. There is plenty that asks for our attention. And often we don't even know how to slow down.

But I hope that is what we are able to do together. Yes, the reality is that the church is only one of many meaningful organizations you participate in. And yet, I continue to believe in the importance of the church as a place that we can gather not only to worship, but to slow down, to develop authentic relationships, to wonder together, to seek new visions, and with God to make a difference in the world.

I believe in the importance of the church because in this community we ask questions that are bigger than ourselves, bigger than our own wants and preferences, questions that direct us toward the heart of God and out into the world.

Friends, we are asking you to consider your commitments to this community in the coming year. But the invitation is bigger than that. It is our hope that you will slow down, step back, sit in the quiet, dream and vision, and lean into what you imagine from that space of rest.

When we slow down and listen, what might we feel called to?

How might we be able to create space for ourselves and others, for our whole world to heal?

What might we imagine as the future for First Christian Church and how we might impact the world together?

Being well rested could give us the space to embrace well-being. It could give us the space to imagine a better, more compassionate course for ourselves as individuals, for our congregation, and for our world. It could give us the opportunity to imagine with God the difference we could make, not just for those of us who are already here, but for the world.

Friends, let's imagine together. And more than just imagining, let's be a community that helps make the world better. Amen.