

"IN PRAISE OF GOOFING OFF"

A Sermon By

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106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
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INTRODUCTION

I like the feel of today's text, taken from Mark's Gospel, chapter six and verse thirty-one.

"And Jesus said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while'....for many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat...."

Have you ever noticed that different people have different attitudes about work? I recently heard about a congregation that had the same pastor for many years. He resigned the position and they hired a new young preacher with some new ideas about church leadership. The first suggestion he made to the church's ruling body was that they hire a part-time person to look after the church lawn. One of the members was quick to point out to him that the former pastor had always taken care of the church's lawn...by himself.

"I'm aware of that" said the new pastor...."And I called him, but he doesn't want to do it anymore!"

DEVELOPMENT

A lazy and always late clerk fiddled around while his irate boss burned and fumed. One day he said,

"You're the most useless person I ever saw...always late getting here....and you don't do an honest hour's work all day. Tell me one single way the firm benefits from employing you...."

The clerk pondered and then responded,

"Well, when I go on vacation, there's no extra work thrown on the others....."

I've known people like that and I'm sure you have, too. Yes, their attitude toward work is a little different. I heard about a farmer down in Tennessee who said that lightning struck an old shed and thus saved him the trouble of tearing it down and then rain washed off his car and saved him that chore, too. And when asked what he was doing now, he replied...."Waiting for an earthquake to shake the potatoes out of the ground".

A little boy picked up a box of something from a shelf in the supermarket and brought it over to his mother. "Oh, no, dear....please put that back...you have to cook that." Yes, people have different attitudes towards work, but one thing our text makes clear to us that we do have a religious responsibility to "goof off" from time to time.

A RESPONSIBILITY TO GOOF OFF FROM TIME TO TIME

And it's true and chances are you agree. This may sound like a strange point to make from the pulpit of a church...but it is true and important. We have a responsibility to take time to rest, to unwind, to relax....to take off our shoes and loose our tie....to take down our hair and let it all hang out, as they use to say. God did not create us to be busy as little bees all the time.

This is a truth that rests at the very heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition with the idea of the Sabbath. "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy" said one of the Ten Commandments and what does that mean to us. The tradition of the Sabbath in the Scriptures is too rich to boil down to a simple sermon, but let's consider a couple of truths, one of which is often ignored.

The Sabbath is to be a day of rest. This truth is based on the Creation story. God worked six days and rested on the seventh and God said we are to rest one day in seven, too. Our Jewish friends and our Seventh Day Adventist friends celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath and most Christians celebrate Sunday, in honor, of course, of the resurrection of our Lord. I truly doubt that God cares which day is reserved for the Sabbath, but it is to be a day of rest.

I don't know about you, but I'm kind of sad to see more and more commercial businesses encroaching on the Sabbath. For some...for many....Sunday has become a major shopping day. It makes me sad not because I'm one of those "legalistic busy-bodies" who wants to restrict people and make them live according to my standards....no, I'm sad because working on Sunday takes many people, not only away from their churches, but also away from their families and it deprives them of the best opportunity in the week to rest, to relax, to unwind. It's a day of rest, a day of renewal.

SABBATH WAS CREATED FOR OUR BENEFIT

Remember, too, that the Sabbath was created for our benefit and we sometimes overlook and ignore that. The Sabbath was not created for God, but rather it was created for us. Jesus makes this point in chapter two of Mark's Gospel. Remember the scene, the incident. He and His disciples were going through the grainfields and the disciples began plucking heads of grain. They were hungry men, but this was the Sabbath and plucking grain was considered work. The Pharisees were quick to bring this to the attention of Jesus. Jesus first answered with a Biblical precedent set by King David and then He said,

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath....."

We need one day a week in which we do not work. God means for us to have one day a week in which we worship and visit friends and relatives and take a nap and go bicycling or walk through the park and whatever it is that helps us to refresh and rekindle our minds and our spirits and our bodies. We need one day out of seven for simply "goofing off". It is our religious responsibility. That's the first thing we need to see and here is a second.

KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

I believe it is a key to a successful life. One of the great myths of life is that the people who succeed in the world are the people who "forever" keep their nose to the grindstone and if you believe that, be careful. I hate to burst your bubble, but it simply is not true. Hard work and dedication and sacrifice are important attributes in life, but some of the most effective people who ever lived have spent a considerable amount of time just "goofing off".

I remember once reading that influential men like Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Henry Ford and John Maynard Keynes knew the value of taking time off, in fact Darwin and Spencer and Keynes only worked two or three hours a day. Their leisurely approach is not widely known because they seldom advertised it.

Ralph Keynes notes in his book, Timelock, that there is far more prestige in seeming harried and overworked than there is in being able to get a lot done in limited amounts of time. And as a result, history's non-workaholics have covered up their apparent indolence, sometimes in rather brazen ways. I think it was Samuel Johnson who once admitted,

"I have, all my life long, been lying down 'til noon. Yet I tell all young men, and tell them with great sincerity, that nobody who does not rise early will ever do any good!"

Benjamin Franklin was history's source of the "early to bed, early to rise" life style, but even he himself liked to stay up late playing chess or chatting with friends....often whiling away the hours tinkering with kites and bottles and keys and stoves. I once read that after introducing the first bath-tub to this country in 1790, he spent many hours inside his own...soaking and reading. And although he advised us to make productive use even of our leisure time, he himself took long and enjoyable trips and tours of Europe. In this sense, says Ralph Keyes, Franklin was a bit of a fraud...far wiser in his actual approach to time than the one he proposed for the rest of mankind to follow. We've taken Franklin's advice whereas we should have followed more his example!

We are not robots. We are human beings who need time for rest and for revitalization. In today's world it is just as important for us to work "smart" as it is to work "hard". We need to rest both our bodies and our brains and over a lifetime we will be more productive if we allow ourselves time for a bit of relaxation....so use these summer weeks carefully, productively.

Nobody was more committed to His work than Jesus of Nazareth. So much was at stake and so little time to get it all done. Yet, on occasion, He would say to His disciples, "Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest". And even then it did not always work out like Jesus planned for the crowds would not let Him alone. But Jesus recognized humanity's need to loosen the strings on the bow from time to time.

TIME FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

And more time thing to lift up. We need some time for fellowship with God. Often when Jesus took His disciples off by themselves, it was for a season of prayer. We knew that our spirits need to be refreshed as well as our minds and our bodies. And this is why the Sabbath has always been a time for worship as well as a time for rest. When we come into this sanctuary, we empty ourselves of the strains and stressed and toil of the week just passed. And we open ourselves to the new possibilities that God has in store for us. If we truly worship, we should leave here feeling lifted, refreshed and ready to face the world once again.

Two willow trees grew a short distance from a stream down in New Mexico. One of them was sturdy and rich with leaves while the other was smaller and less attractive.

Over the years, the owner of the property often wondered why these two trees should have such a different quality and appearance. But unable to find an answer, he dismissed the puzzle from his mind until one week while digging near the trees his shovel struck something hard. When uncovering it, he solved the mystery of the trees.

Years earlier, someone had buried large slabs of a stone wall in that spot. The underground wall prevented the roots of the frail tree from reaching the water in the stream. But there was no wall between the flourishing tree and the water. When we do not give ourselves time to worship God.....when we do not spend time communing with God and having moments of fellowship with God...then we are like that tree that was shut off from the life-giving flow of the stream.

A writer in a book called, Beginnings, has put it this way...

"Some folks in Holland have called the Sabbath 'God's Dyke'.....a helpful analogy....the dike is a protective sea wall that holds back the surging waves and allows people to live in areas that would otherwise be utterly uninhabitable. The Sabbath is like that....just like a dike keeps the quiet Holland farmlands from being engulfed by the Atlantic, a day of rest can keep us from being engulfed by destructive value systems and the corrosive pressures of contemporary society. Humans are such pliable creatures. Immersed in the 'push-and-shove' of daily living, we are in danger of being SQUEEZED into a mis-shapen caricature of what God intended us to become. The Sabbath is God's opportunity to remold us unto His image...."

Jesus said:

"Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while....." for there was much coming and going....

Good advice. Yes, all of us need to relax with family and friends, to slow down and unwind.....time, too, to worship God. Anonymous, that most prolific of all poets, put it this way:

"Take time to LAUGH...it is the music of the soul.
Take time to THINK...it is the source of power.
Take time to PLAY...it is the source of perpetual youth.
Take time to READ...it is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to PRAY...it is the greatest power on earth.
Take time to LOVE and BE LOVED...it is a God-given
privilege.
Take time to be FRIENDLY...it is the road to happiness.
Take time to GIVE....it is too short a day to be selfish.
Take time to WORK....it is the price of success.
Take time for GOD...it is the way of life!"

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these quite moments, O God....O spirit of the living God...fall afresh on us. Melt us. Mold us. Fill us. Use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Amen.

VISITORS: Sunday, January 14, 1996 / Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend

Weather: Slushy, cold, sunny. Not the best of Sundays.

Attendance: 167 (including 8 infants and 14 children)

25 Year Comparison:

1995: 180	1987: 144	1979: 171
1994: 150	1986: 150	1978: 137
1993: 198	1985: 139	1977: 126
1992: 173	1984: 160	1976: 161
1991: 189	1983: 147	1975: 142
1990: 156	1982: 160	1974: 129
1989: 175	1981: 182	1973: 144
1988: 145	1980: 156	1972: 109

1. IT Mr. and Mrs. Jorge (Margaret Ellen) Ferrari: 49 West 87th Street
New York, New York 10024
Telephone: 721 -4982

Pink card. Letter. Signed both a visitor card and the Guest Book. Indicated a Georgia background. In their late twenties or early thirties. PC will follow along with a call since he greeted them at the door. Seemed interested.

2. OT Ms. Kay Brown: 2100 East Balboa Blvd.
Newport Beach, California 92661

Out of town letter. Signed Guest Book. Indicated a tie with the Mesa Verde UM Church, Costa Mesa, California. Can't Place her.

3. OT Mr. Ed Randall and Mike Randall: 238 High Plains Drive,
Orange, Connecticut

Out of town note to the brother (Ed) and nephew (?) (Mike) of Jim Randall and here for the baptism of Timothy James Randall.

4. OT Steven Randall and Lisa Randall: 2405 Whitney Avenue, #710
Hamden, Connecticut 06518

Out of town note to family members in for the baptism of Timothy James Randall. Related to Jim Randall...not sure of relationship however.

(over)

5. OT Scott Randall and Jen Kelly: 238 High Plains Drive
Orange, Connecticut

Out of town note....(call and check names, if you wish to,
with Dana Randall. Here for Timothy James' baptism. Family of
Jim Randall.

BACK AGAIN

1. Amy Shubert: here on Dec. 17th. 2nd or 3rd visit.
2. Jo Beth Moad...haven't seen her in about a year. Member. Has lost weight!
3. Beth Clark. Live in same building as Nivole and Kathryn Gettle.
4. Leslie Thompson: coffee hour, I think...About her 4th visit.
5. Tim O'Connor
6. Alex Flagg...member. Reared in church. Mid twenties.

NOTES:

1. Lisa Ingram Zimmerman's father, Thomas Kent Ingram, passed away on Saturday night, January 13th. PC will be in touch...
2. Clu and Miriam Gulager: members here in 1957 to 1960 period were back for a visit. Coffee hour. Clu and Miriam meant a lot to this church back in PC's early years....will be back on Sunday, the 21st. Call Dave Howard and let David know they are here.
3. Keith Roberts mother who is an ordained UM clergy person will be here this coming Sunday. Reverend Anne V. Roberts: Somerset UM Church. Bill Bonwitt knows her, I believe.
4. Keep Jeff Ramundo's father on our prayer list.
5. Good turn out on Sunday evening for the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. Good food...thanks to Michael Vann. Good speaker thanks to Jan Ernst. And 53 present for it! Good to see Eric DeFreitas here for it.... thanks to Vanessa.
6. Karen Cooper and Joe Stack: 1675 York Avenue, 15 G
NYC, NY 10028
Telephone:

Pink card. Letter. Signed Russell Room Guest Book. PC doesn't recall meeting them. Anyone place them? Doug? Did you recall them?