



Linger Here
Luke 2: 41-52
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I have yearned for the chance to preach on this text. Here is young Jesus in the temple dazzling the teachers with his wisdom and understanding. As someone who works with children, I wanted to remind older folks that children can be wise and that children have much to offer adults and that children can amaze.

That's what I wanted to say in 1600 words or so, until I started working on this—and then what struck me was not Jesus' theological brilliance, but his behavior.

Maybe it's because we are in the mad-dash of holiday activity, the busy-ness of which has caused many of us to forget things or run out of time to do things we wanted to do. In the rush of holiday activity, even Passover activity, things just don't get done. In Mary and Joseph's case, they forgot their son, their first born, the one filled with the Holy Spirit.

Most of us know the rush and chaos of packing up and getting home after time away. And in this chaos, Joseph, Mary, and their traveling party – in a flurry of dust, luggage and feet – left Jesus behind. And Jesus was **CONTENT** to stay behind. It's hard to imagine Jesus didn't notice that his whole family was packing up to go back to Nazareth. You can call Jesus a lot of things, but clueless is not one of them. So on some level, Jesus was **CHOOSING** to stay in the temple.

Everyone else was rushing to get back to life, and understandably so. Joseph had work to do. Mary had a home to attend to. The kids had school. Even then there were schools, though maybe not AYSO and Windmills and the Academy and Scouts and TOPS. So while everyone else rushed to get back to normal, Jesus stayed. Jesus lingered in the temple.

I love that word...linger. Linger suggests wasting time in the best possible way. It suggests slowing down or resting. It suggests an in-between-ness. It is a pause. Linger is a comma in activity. In other words, in the Luke story, Jesus was taking Sabbath. This twelve-year-old child has much to teach us about Sabbath and rest.

We need to be taught because we don't like rest. We live in a society that values activity. We wear busy-ness as a badge of honor. And an empty calendar looks like failure. We don't want to waste time, because time is our most precious and scarce commodity. Whereas 40 years ago, at least one day of the week was off-limits for work and sporting events and performances and shopping, now all days are fair game for filling. And we fill them to the brim. On any given Sunday, families are not in church school or church because children have soccer or hockey or

baseball or Saturday night sleepovers or recitals and concerts. Last Monday, 26 families used the childcare service FUSH offered for parents needing to do last minute errands. One mother asked me not to tell, but she was using the time to exercise. “My husband would kill me if he knew...” Who has time for health?

There’s paid work and volunteer work and spectator work, which is the work adults do when watching children perform. Few parents and grandparents dare to miss a child’s performance or sporting event in an ever-growing number of performances and games. Most families have some version of a spread sheet on their refrigerator to track of family activities. Scheduling a class during lunchtime is not uncommon at OPRF or at any high school. Lunch wastes time.

Childless folk and empty-nesters: we can’t tsk-tsk too loudly. We are no better.

Most of us who work, work more hours than ever before. In the church world, a fifty-hour week is the new forty-hour week. In her book, *Willing Slaves – How the Overwork Culture is Ruling our Lives*, Madeleine Bunting, reported that from 1977 to 1997 the average American work week had increased from 43.6 hours to 47.1 hours, not including the commute. The economic downturn has not necessarily changed that trend. In the last year, productivity has spiked, suggesting that those still employed are doing more and working longer for the same or less pay.

Even in the church we buy into the cultural norm “busy is better.” Every night of the week, this parking lot is full. We now have three Christmas Eve services instead of two. Last Good Friday, we had worship in the sanctuary, a procession through the village with members carrying a cross, and a 36-hour vigil in the chapel that bumped right into the early Easter worship. We have governing committees and small groups, mission groups and prayer groups. We are very busy being God’s hands and feet, because if we don’t do it, who will? Dare I say we are over-committed disciples? Even I say at the end of announcements, “Our life together is rich and full!”

Family life. Work Life, Church life. It’s ALL activity ALL the time.

Where do we find time to rest or take Sabbath or linger as Jesus did in the temple? Part of the issue is that we can’t –or won’t—say “No.” Theologian Karl Barth wrote, “A being is only free when it can limit and determine its activity.” Many of us are not very free. We don’t set limits on our commitments. We won’t say “No” for fear of being seen as a slacker or feeling like a slacker or denying our children yet another activity. And if this doesn’t apply to you, it may very well apply to your child or your grandchildren caught in the rat race of suburban life.

So how do we say “No” as well as “Yes?” How do we find balance? How do we say “No” to what wears us out and “Yes” to what give us life? How do we say “Yes” to Sabbath?

One thing we can do is take seriously what our faith tells us. We can look at what God does, God, the one in whose image we are created:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:1-3)

God did a lot of creating, and who's to say that God couldn't have done a lot more creating after Day 6. After all, there were computers and Velcro and Tivo yet to create, but God chose to stop and rest. God chose to say "No" to more activity. God needed to kick back. So do we. And what's more, God declared the Sabbath and only the Sabbath holy. God blessed much, including humans, and called much "good," including humans. But God declared only the Sabbath "holy."

To make sure we don't miss the point, a book later, in Exodus, God made a commandment out of rest, the longest commandment, the only commandment that needs three verses to make its point.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20: 8-11)

Notice that God did not say activity or work is unnecessary. Instead, God instructs us to work AND rest, as God works AND rests. So who are we to think we AND our children don't need rest...not sightseeing rest, not partying rest, but pure, unadulterated, staring up at the sky, daydreaming rest...

God acts in history and in our lives, but God needs rest, nurturing rest. So do we.

And Jesus somehow, at a young age, knew that too...So in Luke, there is Jesus, lingering in the temple when everyone else is rushing to get back to Nazareth and work. There is Jesus taking time to recharge his batteries. Yes, he was in some sort of deep theological conversation and amazed the teachers with his wisdom and understanding. But I hope we can also see him as taking some Sabbath time, taking the Jesus-equivalent of staring up at the clouds.

This is a pattern we'll see over and over in his life, when we're not rushing past these verses to get to the healing and parables. Throughout his life, Jesus withdrew from the crowds and the healing and the teaching to rest and pray. If you don't believe me, check out Luke 9. Read it as homework later. Notice how Jesus takes time out. There are other places too. Trust me.

In Chapter 2 of Luke, then, we see that Jesus knew early that prayer and time away were important. Even as a child Jesus practiced Sabbath time and honored holy time.

Let's be clear. I am hardly a master of Sabbath. Forty-two hours after directing the 5 PM Christmas Eve service with its cast of angels and shepherds and magi and animals and senior high readers I am here, working. But I also know that if I am to stay healthy and sane, I need rest. I need to follow Commandment 4. I need to remember that mine are not the only hands and feet that can do God's work. I need to follow Jesus and linger in the presence of God sometimes, as Jesus did in this story. So do you.

Sabbath is a discipline like prayer and service that takes practice, but it is worth the practice. Sabbath is live-giving. Because, in the end, if we don't slow down, linger sometimes and rest fully, we aren't much use to anyone. Think of it this way: when you fly, you get the safety talk. The attendant reminds you to put the oxygen mask on yourself **BEFORE** you help someone else including a child. It's counterintuitive—we think we should take care of someone else **BEFORE** we take care of ourselves. Our story in Luke suggests otherwise.

We need to rest, daydream, linger if we are to have the strength and energy to BE God's hands and feet, to take care of others and serve others. We need the peace that comes with rest if we are to share that peace with others and with the world. It's not a zero-sum game. Jesus shows us. God declares that work is important and rest is holy.

We have just finished the season of Advent, four weeks when time slows down and we have to wait for the carols and celebration and Christmas. Maybe, just maybe, this year we can linger a little in this slowed-down time, like the child Jesus did in the temple. There will be time enough to work and serve.

Meister Eckhart wrote, "God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by subtracting."

So for now, subtract, slow down, breathe, breathe, breathe. Amen.