

To start off our year, (the folks visiting here today) took a trip to the Montreat College Conference. Thanks to the generosity of folks at First Presbyterian Church and the Alma College Chapel, many of our fees for travel and attendance were covered. Thank you for this opportunity to grow in our faith. While relaxing in the beautiful mountains of North Carolina, we learned about what it means to “keep going” and how we can do that in a healthy way. Our world today can feel very dark, especially for us young people who are still learning about how the world works. With the violence and hate that’s often shown to us in the media, it can feel like things are hopeless. We are told that unless we are creating something worthwhile or working constantly towards our future, we are wasting our time. Unless we are keeping ourselves always busy and working for our future, we are not being “productive”. But, what about enjoying our time in this present moment with God?

The speakers chosen to lead us in the conference brought something new to many of our hearts: We don’t always have to, “do”. In fact, it might be good for us to just, “be.”. There are many different ways that we can “be” and sit with the moments we are given from our creator. Our Hebrew scripture today is about how seeds that are nourished will produce beautiful things. The rain from the sky doesn’t complete it’s cycle without nourishing the earth. Think back to the game we played earlier, “red light, green light”. It may have felt a little silly, but there was some serious purpose to it. Sometimes, whether we like it or not, life makes us stop because we need to take care of ourselves or make a change. Just like the water in our passage and the slowing down in our game, we need to nourish ourselves so that we can complete our own cycles of life. Whatever they may be.

Something else that came up at Montreat was the different ways that we can rest and care for ourselves. Something I found interesting was that rest doesn’t always mean taking a nap or putting off our commitments for the day. Rest can mean taking time to do something we enjoy or to be with someone we love. Even reading or going for a walk could be thought of as a form of rest. There was a serious emphasis on the fact that we take the time to rest and find what works best for ourselves. The ways that we rest can define our attitudes about daily life.

Another thing that can define our attitudes and the way we rest are the people we let in. One of the points made at Montreat was to consider who is in our village and how we interact with the different villages in our lives. Maybe for you, you have a few different groups that you let into your life. Close family, church

family, and friends might be some that you hold tight. Maybe you are involved in different groups that you share values and serve your community with. The people we allow in our villages affects weather it's time for us to slow down and take care of ourselves, or time to get going. The people we have in our lives can even define how we see ourselves. Some of the people who you let in are those who will see all that you can be and that you are, and push you to stay fast to that. Your village can help you know when to rest and when to keep going.

But, what about when we feel like we just don't have the time or the space to rest because of all that life is throwing at us? Maybe, when it gets to the end of the day and you do have time to just be, you feel like your heart is still in the same place as when you are being busy busy busy. Well, rest can be and is a form of resistance. Weather through the media we see or the people we meet, we are constantly being told to KEEP GOING! And not in a way that feeds us. We go online and see all the things other people are doing, and compare ourselves. That is something that our generation has known since we were very young, and this can be harmful. We have this "hustle culture" that tells us to constantly work and not be "lazy", otherwise we are just being a waste. Well, what if being, "lazy" isn't even a thing? What if taking time to ourselves and letting go of the fear that we might have for if we stop? One of our speakers said, "rest is resisting fear and resting in God's safety and strength.". It was also said that, "rest is resisting the idea that we are not enough, and recognizing the power that lies within us". It seems almost a contradiction that rest would help you let go of fear- for me, "letting myself be" can often result in my thoughts taking over and not being able to pause. But, if we consciously decide to rest, we may not have the same experience. The poem Karmella read today teaches us just this. When we give ourselves time to rest and be, we can be better, and let our lights shine in every aspect of life. We can be better stewards of God and better siblings in Christ.

Rest isn't just something we should do because it is productive or helps us, but something we should do because it is our divine right to do so. If you are going through life too fast, you are not going to end up where you want to be. Even God took a break after they were done making our world.

Amen.