

“Soul Care in Seasons of Stress” - 1

I. **I don't know about you, but I've been stressed lately.**

A. “Normal” stresses of life

1. **kids getting sick:** two weeks ago we were scrambling more than normal, Junia get to urgent care
2. Financial stress: **car accident.** Driving to pick up my daughter on Wednesday; listening to NPR, fretting about the world, look to the side of the road at something, look back forward and I notice two cars in front of me stopped at a green light. Slam on my breaks. Rear end the car in front of me. Not what I was planning for the day. Waiting to hear if the car was totaled: we just paid it off last month.
3. All of us are involved in **church planting**, which, especially if you're one of the people helping carry this thing, is a stressful endeavor. Few people and a a lot of jobs to fill, even to put on a small service, and it tends to fall to the same group of people each week, and that can get tiring. Can sometimes seem hard to see the fruit.

B. On top of that, the **reality of the season were living in**; the season of a new president and administration.

1. **Some us feel need to resist.** We may find our facebook feeds filled with urgent news items, as well as action items for involvement, or invitations to community meetings, demonstrations. But all of that, if we're honest...
 - a) can feel overwhelming
 - b) where to start?
 - c) what news to be freaked out about?
 - d) how not to get sucked in to despair?
 - e) I'll be honest, at times I can get stuck into a loop looking at my news feeds of anxiety that is paralyzing.
2. **Some of us may not feel like “resistance” describes where you are, but you may also feel certain amount of stress about that.** Is that ok? What does it mean that everyone else on my facebook feed or my community group is freaked out?

C. **How do we take care of ourselves in the long run?**

1. Is that even a valid question? Or is self-care simply an expression of privilege?
2. **Audre Lord was a leading activist in the 20th century.** She was a poet, a writer, a feminist, a womanist, a lesbian, and civil-rights leader. “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”
 - a) self care is a way of asserting that each of our lives matter, and we must care for our lives, even and especially if the cultures we find ourselves in do not value those lives in the same way as we do.
3. We are going to spend the **next 2 Sundays exploring ways we might prioritize the work of caring for ourselves in stressful times**, and then likely will come back to it throughout the year
 - a) doing that both by looking to the Bible for models
 - b) also looking to people in our community to share some of what works for them

D. Let's start with Jesus

II. **If Anyone had an important agenda, with much work to be done and much urgency within which to do it, it was him.**

- A. Only had about three years of time to do his ministry
- B. Stress of living on the road for those three years

- C. Knew that the end game would come with his execution. Had to walk the fine line of always under threat but needing to impart as much as he could before things got out of control. Didn't want things to run away from him too fast.
- D. And yet, with all he had to do, **Jesus also had a particular discipline that he seemed to practice again and again: withdrawal.** It's a pattern we see over and over:
 1. We saw it immediately after he was baptized, which many see as the official start of his ministry. Luke 4:1 ***"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil."***
 2. Mark 1:35: ***"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray."***
 3. Luke 5:15-16: ***"...vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer."***
- E. Why this pattern? **What about withdrawal is a priority to Jesus?** How is he using these times of withdrawal to nurture his soul and care for himself? We're going to look at one story of Jesus withdrawing to get a little more clarity around what this means for him.

III. Mark 6:30-46

"30 The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. 31 Then Jesus said, 'Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.' He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat.

32 So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. 33 But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. 34 Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

35 Late in the afternoon his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. 36 Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy something to eat.'

37 But Jesus said, 'You feed them.'

"With what?" they asked. "We'd have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!"...(and this of course begins the account of one of Jesus' most stunning miracles. Asks his followers to round up whatever food can be found: only five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus blesses the food and has them hand it out to all. Everyone is satisfied and they pick up 12 baskets of leftovers....)

"44 A total of 5,000 men and their families were fed.

45 Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and head across the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home. 46 After telling everyone good-bye, he went up into the hills by himself to pray."

A. **Jesus prioritizes rest and refreshment.** - He wants to go off with his disciples to rest and have some peace and quiet and eat. Nourish their bodies with food and rest.

1. Seems really basic. Of course we need to eat. Of course we need to sleep. But the reality is, often when we're under stress and we are faced with things that feel really urgent, it's easy to neglect those basic things.
2. **Jesus didn't let the urgency of the work keep him or his followers from taking care of themselves.** He sought to carve out intimate time away from the crowds and the work where they could replenish.

B. **Jesus takes the rhythm of work and withdrawal seriously, but holds it flexibly.**

1. In this particular story, Jesus and his followers are on their way to their downtime when folks meet them there, surprise them at the place they're going for alone time. Rather than simply sending them away, Jesus decides to change the plan. As it says, "he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd."
2. **He adapts the plan.** Decides the get-away still needs to happen, but it can wait a bit. He responds to the needs of the moment with sensitivity to what God is doing in his midst.
3. Later they have the "out" of supper time. Rather than turn folks away, like the disciples suggest, and finally go off and get some food, Jesus senses now isn't a time to retreat but to **participate in something amazing.**
4. But the miracle itself is **one that brings refreshment.** Jesus is taking the need for nourishment, and rather than making it the annoying, mundane, reason you need to break, so you can get back to the real stuff of life, **he's infusing his very presence and power in this elemental part of living. He's centering the care and refreshment of human beings in his work.**
5. After that's done, they do board a boat and get away. It still happens, just in a different order than initially planned.
6. The point of all this: **Jesus doesn't hold to a rigid rhythmic practice that has no room for the ebbs and flows of life circumstance.** He can hold to his practice and also have room to respond to people in his midst. As he would say of the sabbath, ***"The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."*** (Mark 2:27)

C. Jesus uses his times of withdrawal to reconnect with God.

1. At the end we see what often is found in the passage about Jesus withdrawing; that a vital part of his withdrawal practice is the opportunity to pray.
2. This is his time to **connect with his loving parent.** To commune with the God which he has dwelled with infinitely before his incarnation, but connection looks very different when he is fully human.
3. Jesus needs to take the time to be with God. **It seems to fuel him.** At times it even gives him direct insight for his work. Luke gives an account of one of these times:
 - a) ***"One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. 13 At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles."*** Luke 6:12-13
 - b) seems that his time in prayer directly contributed to him knowing who to call. **Leaves us to wonder, if he hadn't taken these time outs for rest, replenishment, and reconnection with God,** would he have had such clarity regarding what he was meant to do?

D. So we see that all of these seem vitally important to Jesus: rest and refreshment, flexibility in the rhythms of that, and times to connect intimately with God. This seems to be a pattern of Jesus' self-care, or soul-care regimen.

IV. So we've gotten a sense that **Jesus cares about us caring for ourselves.** That if we feel called to the work of justice, **it demands that we have all of ourselves to give.** The higher the stakes, the more important that **we are in good shape,** present to the work, and not on the verge of burnout. What does that look like?

A. We are made differently. Some of the things that feed my soul, help me connect spiritually and rejuvenate, might not feed yours. So in these teachings I thought it could be helpful to hear in this practical part of the teaching from others in our community about particular soul-care practices that they've developed to help them through distressing times. My hope is that some

of these might resonate and help us either find something we want to try ourselves, or just get our creativity flowing so we can find those things that might serve us well to discover.

B. **David Lai** - Meditation

C. **Connie Barker** - Bible Study

V. Final thoughts and End with an invitation from Jesus to soul care.

A. Matthew 11:28 - 30

“28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”