

Luke 4:1-13

“Slow me down, Lord!

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time.

Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the ever-lasting hills.

Break the tension of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory.

Help me to know the magical, restoring power of sleep.

Teach me the art of taking minute vacations – of slowing down to look at a flower, to pat a dog, or to read a few lines from a good book.

Let me look up into the branches of the towering oak, and know that it grew great and strong, because it grew slowly and well.”¹

Last week we reflected on the need to find a good balance in life. This week, as we

¹ Peterson, Wilfred Arlan

conclude our series of reflections on the issue of time in relation to the stewardship of our resources, we are going to look at the subject of rest. When God created the world he took time to rest. The Hebrew for rest is simply to cease, to stop. If God chose to include rest in his view of a balanced creation then who are we to argue with Him? But we do! Have you had a good rest this week? Rest is not the same as doing nothing. Have you taken a good rest this week?

It may seem strange that I have chosen the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the desert as

my text for the subject of rest. After all, those forty days of suffering that Christ endured would not be surpassed until he came to the Crucifixion three years later. Yet, those days in the desert were unique and in his solitary state Christ teaches us about the significance of time apart from what we would ordinarily be doing and it could be argued that the forty days of trial gave him the strength or the rest that he needed to sustain the entirety of his ministry.

So what do we learn? Well, the first thing is that we cannot find rest if we are totally self-

absorbed. Jesus was repeatedly tempted to dwell on his vulnerability and weakness and to succumb to his own desires. Of course, he refused to yield to these temptations. How would any of us have got on?

In early 2001 some towns in India were stricken by a plague of monkeys. The monkeys were so numerous they would invade homes, bite people, and make off with food supplies. It was agreed the monkeys would have to be caught and relocated. The people in these towns resorted to a traditional method for catching them. They gathered their old milk bottles, tied them to

the ground, and then placed something sweet such as a lolly inside the bottle. Then when a monkey comes along and sees the sweet he places his hand inside the bottle, but with the sweet enclosed in his palm his fist is too big to get back out the bottle. Our monkey will pull and push in an effort to get that sweet out, but he will not let it go, not even as his captors approach. And so the monkey is caught, literally with his hand in the lolly jar! We likewise are as good as the monkeys at resisting temptation.

We don't get on very well and that's the point. We live under temptations every day

of our lives and we don't have a 100% record of resistance. Far from it, in fact, we may have a habit of yielding to temptation because we feel it cuts us a bit of slack. It makes life that bit more enjoyable. It helps us to ease off and rest up a bit. But it does nothing of the sort, quite the opposite. It wears us down. It makes us obsess more and more about our passions. It makes us worry about our lives and fills us with concern every day and we grow more and more tired of it all.

Jesus entered forty days and forty nights of temptation and trial which we would assume

would have worn him out. But in it he found strength and rest for three years of busy but well-balanced living.

What good is it to any of us if we are burned out by constant activity or by living to try and please others?

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright once told of an incident that may have seemed insignificant at the time, but had a profound influence on the rest of his life. The winter he was 9, he went walking across a snow-covered field with his reserved, no-nonsense uncle. As the two of them reached the far end of the field, his uncle stopped him. He pointed out his

own tracks in the snow, straight and true as an arrow's flight, and then young Frank's tracks meandering all over the field. "Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle to the woods and back again," his uncle said. "And see how my tracks aim directly to my goal. There is an important lesson in that."

Years later the world-famous architect liked to tell how this experience had greatly contributed to his philosophy in life. "I determined right then," he'd say with a

twinkle in his eye, "not to miss most things in life, as my uncle had."²

There is a difference between succumbing to temptation and enjoying the good things of life. The enjoyment of God's good world brings us true rest in the midst of our work. The forty days enforced seclusion taught Jesus how essential it was that he got time away throughout his ministry. We will frequently read in the Gospels of Jesus retreating to a lonely place to pray. Often this would involve ascending a mountain or travelling to a remote place or going out on a

² Focus on the Family letter, September, 1992, p. 14

boat. Whatever it was, it brought him the rest he needed to tackle all of the demands that would be placed on his time. He was happy to slow down in order that he could handle the pace.

A Primary One pupil wondered why her father brought home a briefcase full of work every evening. Her mother explained, "Daddy has so much to do that he can't finish it all at the office." "Well, then," asked the child innocently, "why don't they put him in a slower group?"³

³ Daily Bread, August 8, 1989.

We all need to be put in a slower group. I hope you have noticed that through the three weeks when we have been considering the importance of time in relation to our whole lives that I have not mentioned the church. If you thought that reflections on the Stewardship of Time should major on how we can manage to squeeze more time into church activity or commitment then think again. Good stewardship of time is about looking to achieve the balance in life that is going to help you to blossom as a person. Good, well-balanced, healthy people make for effective Christians. May we all take the

opportunity to review our use of time that we
can put in place the discipline needed to
restore right balance. Amen.