

Psalm 3:5-I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the LORD sustains me; Psalm 4:8-I will lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety; Psalm 127:2-It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives sleep to God's beloved.

So, in last week's sermon, we talked a little bit about rest in the sense of getting away from the chaos of our busy days and getting some peaceful, private time. Remember Jesus sneaking off, away from his apostles? This morning, I want to talk about rest in another sense: sleep. I want to suggest—briefly, because we've got a special service today, with other things to enjoy—I want to suggest that sleep can be an act of worship, a spiritual practice that both we and God delight in.

Doctors tell us that in order to be healthy, humans should average about eight hours of sleep each day. At some points in life, we need more, and at other points, we need less, but in general, we as humans are wired to get 8ish hours of sleep a night. That's what we need to flourish, to be our best selves. Now, since there are 24 hours in each day, that means that, ideally, we would be asleep for about 1/3 of our life on earth.

From the perspective of faith, I find that very intriguing. Why did God make us this way? Couldn't God have wired us to need less sleep, to be awake and active for a greater percentage of our lives? And wouldn't that make more sense? I mean, think of all that we could accomplish if we didn't have to sleep so much? There's so much work to be done in our world—doesn't it seem like God made our bodies inefficient? Our first reading says that there's a race of faith to be run, set before us—why did God make us so that, for a whole third of every day, we have to stop running that race and just...lie there?

Well, it seems to me that one of the theological lessons we are meant to learn from our need for sleep is that God is not solely concerned with what we accomplish. If that were the case, if all God cared about was the good deeds that we do and the successes we achieve, then indeed, God wasn't very efficient in creating us. But I believe, friends, that God created us for more than good deeds and grand accomplishments. We are not simply tools that God has made to perform certain tasks; we are creatures who God loves—and who God loves independent of what we

do or don't do. We don't *earn* God's love through our actions and accomplishments; we just have it. And we are meant to *rest* in it. Sleep can become worship when we embrace the reality that we are God's beloved children, regardless of what we do or don't do.

Sleep can also become worship when we embrace the reality that we aren't always in control. It's easier to neglect that reality when we're awake. Throughout the day, we make choices, our choices have effects, and we are often tempted to fancy ourselves masters of our own destiny. Of course, that is only a dream, from which we are rudely awakened every time disappointment hits or tragedy strikes. But whenever we sleep, we *know* that we aren't in control, simply because we aren't able to *do* anything. We're just...lying there, at our most vulnerable. Meanwhile, it is God who sustains us—keeping our lungs breathing, keeping our heart beating, rejuvenating our muscles, our bones, our brain. God is caring for us, loving us, as we sleep. And when we wake, we can rejoice in the reminder that ultimately God is in control of our lives. So, it's okay to take a break. It's good to get some shut-eye.

Now, having said this, not everyone finds sleep worshipful. Some of us are living with insomnia or frequent nightmares. Some of us have experienced pain, stress, or horror to such an extent that even when our body is wired to rest, it can't. This happened to people in the Bible, too. Hebrew prophets and psalmists would cry out to God because they found no peace during the day and no peace at night. I imagine that at least one of these prophets or psalmists looked for comfort in the words of Deuteronomy, where we read, "The eternal God is your resting place." In God's eternal realm, friends, we will all have perfect rest as God's beloved children. In the meantime, let us seek the rest for which our bodies are wired and for which our souls long. Let us lie down to sleep in remembrance of the truth that God loves us even when we aren't doing anything. Let us lie down to sleep in remembrance of the truth that sometimes we don't have control, and sometimes we're vulnerable, and that's okay. Let us lie down to sleep in remembrance of the truth that just as God wants us to share God's love through service in the world, God also wants us to receive God's love through rest. Amen.