

My heart breaks for all the soldiers currently fighting around the world! And for civilians fleeing bombs landing in their towns and cities. One of the things that really distresses me, aside from the carnage and loss of lives, is that war leaves little opportunity for sleep, or rest of any kind! War will always cause restlessness, fear and anxiety. And how critical are rest and sleep, for daily self care! One bible verse says, God gives sleep to God's beloved children. And... we hear from Jesus, Come to Me, and I will give you rest! And... we hear from sociologists always about studies on quality sleep, how vitally necessary it is to rest the body and mind.

The implications of the Bible are that finding rest IN GOD, as shelter and comfort for our *souls*, is something that goes beyond earthly provisions for shelter and comfort. Right now, refugees are finding shelters and comfort in new lands with new hosts. But when they go to sleep at night, they still need something deep within to allay fear and anxiety, something that will allow for rest. As Followers of Jesus, we say that meditating on Jesus himself ("Come to Me") will indeed give us deep rest, as he promised... maybe because he is the living example of one who proved that he can walk through any valley, even the valley of the shadow of death, that he can share any suffering with us. Or we may find deepest comfort in the idea that Jesus left us the Holy Spirit that lives deep within us to comfort, strengthen and guide. Jesus even calls this Spirit "The Comforter" at one point.

The comfort of "God" we know comes in many many ways. The Psalm writer calls God "my Shepherd... who leads me beside still waters." Something about *stillness* is supposed to get us in touch with God. Maybe it is because we shut down a lot of the other noises and distractions of life, allowing us to hear the very subtle "bubbling up" (a phrase I love) of a Creator God, the Source of all life and energy in the Universe. I really do believe that some of the most creative energy can come to us in the early morning hours (and sometimes in the quiet of the evening if we do not fill ourselves with too much evening news!). Surely

we could all do with less news these days; there is only so much sadness and suffering we can take. Even Jesus needed breaks from his sacrificial work. We remember the famous story of him having a nap in the back seat of a boat during a storm.

Yes, the Bible speaks of getting in touch with God in quiet moments. The Psalm this morning, 63, speaks of thinking of God while “lying in bed,” meditating on God “in the watches of the night.” What better time to allow quietness to lead us toward the comfort of a greater Spirit. And Psalm 46 is very direct about saying “BE STILL... and know that I am God.” (This means that one way of sensing God’s presence is to Be Still!) Of course there are times in the day that can become special quiet times. My college Christian fellowship always used the phrase “quiet time” ... to remind us all to set aside prayer time and bible reading time every day. Sometimes we would check up on one another: “Have you been having regular quiet time?”

Stillness and quietness can of course also involve some motion. Many of us love simply walking trails, like in Moseley Woods or in Maudslay State Park. And this time of year, we can begin walking beaches and listening to waves. There is something soothing, perhaps even mystical about the rhythmic sound of the waves. Many friends in Yoga or Eastern meditation will call this kind of meditation simply “Present Moment Awareness,” which is simply a way of saying “be fully alive, engaged, and receptive to the beauty of God’s creation. Many start with just the beauty of paying attention to our own breath, as we breathe in and breathe out, in a relaxed manner.

Let me engage your imagination in a few quiet moments of poetry, poetry about moments of engaging with God as the spirit of life, the breath of life, in many beautiful moments. Yes, this poetry comes from the poetry of song, from Ken Medema, in his song called TIME. He starts by quoting Ecclesiastes, “to everything there is a season, and a TIME for every purpose under heaven... *“time to sit by a lazy lake and watch the waves making love to the shore....time to stand in the jet*

black night, and watch the stars as they dance across the sky...time to watch a tiny baby sleeping, or hold a little girl who's weeping... time to sit with the old man when he's dying, or watch the young birds learn the art of flying... time to walk on a sandy beach and put my feet in the cool cool sea.... Time to read a book right to its ending, time to hold someone who needs befriending....time to learn the wisdom of the ages, time to learn the wisdom of a child. This is all finding TIME to be fully aware and engaged in the present moment, to be able to let go of anxieties and fears about the future, to live in appreciation and gratitude for the gift of life that is right now.

We are not on the front lines of war, yet we too often put ourselves on some "front lines" of stress and anxiety. We DO have time and safe places to take a walk or take a nap. In our day to day lives, most of us have the privilege of setting aside some time for God, for times of stillness and quietness, perhaps in the early morning, or in the evening, or even some mid-afternoon break... or on a Sunday morning when duties and responsibilities can wait a bit!

So, now on Sunday morning, I would like to make time, right now, for some intentional stillness, restful moments with God, with the Holy Spirit. I wrote a song a few years back, and Lance *Eskelund* masterfully arranged the song with four choir parts! Please listen meditatively, and then at the end of the song, let's have about 2 minutes of actual silence, when good thoughts and images can bathe and restore our souls.

BE STILL by Ross Varney, arr. by Lance Eskelund

Be Still and know that I am God... (Psalm 46)

Follow me beside the waters still...(Psalm 23)

Come to me and I will give you rest....(Matthew 11)

Live in me and I will live in you...(John 15)