

Sermon

Rest and Re-create

Fun fact: tomorrow, Feb. 11, is National Don't Cry Over Spilled Milk Day. A day to remind us to not worry and not stress over the little things. I don't know about you, but I need constant reminders of this – because it's *hard*.

One of my favorite shows when my kids were little was Fraggles. The adorable Fraggles lived in a cave and learned lots of fun life lessons while singing and dancing their way through life. "Laugh your cares away down at Fraggles," they sang each week.

I remember one episode especially, where Moki Fraggles came upon his friend Red (she of the delightful red pigtailed) holding a carton of milk. She pours out a little milk, then goes, "Urp. Snuff-gulp. Hmmm..." As soon as she recovers her composure, she repeats the whole process.

"Hi, Red, whatcha doing?" he asks.

Dramatically, Red answers, "I'm NOT CRYING OVER SPILLED MILK."

Red was practicing the "work hard at it" method of overcoming the tendency to kick ourselves for every mistake, every missed opportunity, every ill of the world that we haven't been able to fix. If, as Scott Adams says, "Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes," – and I believe you can't be creative unless you are willing to make mistakes! – then we must be willing and able to let go of our expectations that we personally can, and must, *make everything right*.

In typical Fraggles fashion, Moki ends up drawing Red back into the life of the community, and Red finds later in the episode that times of rest and joy in the company of her Fraggles friends go a long way to blunt the edges of those "spilled milk" times of life.

In the armed services, this is called R&R, or rest and recreation, and I believe they are paired up that way for a reason. When we think of rest, we often think of quiet times of lounging, reading, or meandering in the woods; and recreation often implies active pursuits such as biking, partying, games or eating out. Both, however, serve the same purpose: they refresh and renew our spirits.

Rest and recreation are re-creation.

It's easy to feel guilty, though, when we "take time off." The to-do list in our lives and in creating a better world is never-ending. The pace at which we tackle that to-do list has become ever more feverish in pitch. The access to information has increased to such a degree that we often feel overwhelmed just getting up in the morning.

But we burn out, my friends. "All work and no play makes us toast," to paraphrase an old saying. I think there is wisdom in the old religious traditions in which "sabbath" is a commandment. Why would there need to be a rule saying people have to rest? Because it is human nature to feel driven to do more, more, more when we care about something. Whether we are trying to support a family, raise healthy and happy children, serve our clients well, or work for social justice, if we never let ourselves take a break, we can burn out.

Let me tell you the story of Carolyn. Carolyn was six when she saw a newsreel about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Horrified at such suffering, such brutality, she became a peace activist in her heart from that moment. Years later, during the days of the Freedom Riders, she was distressed that her Baptist Church and the other Christian churches in Austin, Texas were silent about discrimination. But she could not sit by; so she joined a UU church and began a journey of intense activism.

In the 1980s she became a leader in the Sanctuary movement, at that time to offer illegal shelter to political refugees from Central America, those opposing American policies. She traveled to Nicaragua and helped clear stones from land the revolutionary Sandinista government had given to peasants, under constant threat of attack by the U.S. backed contras. She traveled around the United States, sometimes on speaking tours, sometimes moving with refugees among safe houses or churches. Her life was intense with demonstrations, arrests, threats of legal action and violence, infiltration, and endless meetings.

Late one night, she was driving her close friend Pat home from one of those meetings. When they got to Pat's house, Carolyn told her friend, "I feel like a piece of dried cardboard that has lain in the attic for years. Just open wide the door, and I'll be dust." She was TIRED. Pat just sat with her, and Carolyn loved her for it.

Then Carolyn McDade drove to her own home, walked through the house in the dark, for her husband and three children were asleep. She found her piano. What emerged was a prayer from her heart: May I not drop out. "Spirit of Life, come unto me!" she sang. Refresh me, renew me, give me hope! "SING in my heart all the stirrings of compassion." It was not written, but prayed. "I knew more than anything," she said, "that I wanted to continue in faith with the movement."

The song she sang that night has become one of Unitarian Universalism's best-loved hymns, "Spirit of Life," because it articulates so well the need for refreshment, re-vitalization, re-creation. The need to restore our relationship with the forces of Good in the Universe; to look up from the spilled milk and be cradled in the arms of Love, for a time.

Restoring our relationship with God (Unitarians spell God with two o's) requires TIME: time to reconnect, time to celebrate and play, time to rest. Not to do this sends a signal that what is on the to-do list right now is more important than relationship and creating a sustainable rhythm for the long-haul of justice work. And it robs us of the ability to engage in this creative process itself. Rest leads to dreaming and the cycle of creativity renews.

I recently saw a cartoon on Facebook. A man is sitting on a bench, looking out over a beautiful pond with woods all around. His dog is sitting at his feet. The man is surrounded by those clouds that cartoons use to represent what the character is thinking. He is thinking about his taxes, his yardwork, his car that needs repair, the argument he had with his daughter. The dog has one cloud by his head, and in it is a picture of the man on the bench by the pond and the dog sitting at his feet.

They say some people spell God D-O-G, and maybe that is why. The dog does not bring his troubles, responsibilities, or plans for the future to the park. He relaxes into the moment and is fully present to it.

It takes a lot of trust to let go like that. We have to trust that it's not all up to us. That sometimes it's ok to rest. That we can - for a while - put the work down because others are ready to pick it up, knowing that we will be there to pick it up when rest calls to them.

So today I leave you with this call from Aly Halpert: "Loosen, loosen, baby, you don't have to carry the weight of the world in your skin and your bones, let go, let go, let go."