

Epler's Church UCC, Leesport, PA July 21, 2019.

Sermon. Matthew 22:32-40. 1 Corinthians 13

“Don't Forget...To Take Care of Yourself”

As a pastor it is sometimes difficult to take time for ourselves. We spend so much time worrying and taking care of other people and our own families that we sometimes forget to take care of ourselves. This is true of many other people who dedicate themselves to the service of others, whether that is by profession or just by caring for others which can be detrimental to one's own health. Our two passages that were read this morning help us all to know that we need to love ourselves and by loving ourselves, we need to take care of ourselves.

Our Matthew text tells us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is an important message, too, that is not the focus of today, but will be talked about in two weeks during my last sermon in the series: “Don’t Forget...to Love Each Other.”

This passage from Matthew shows Jesus being tested by the leaders. He is being asked this question as they are trying to trap him. What is the greatest commandment? Jesus answers in a way that follows the law, but also goes one step farther. Love your God...but also love your neighbor as yourself.

This passage has always been a struggle for me, because I always come up with the same question: Just what does it mean

to love ourselves? Our New Testament text gives us a letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. This passage is very familiar and is used very often at weddings. Paul says that faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.

In the NRSV translation of the scriptures there are 317 times that the word love is used in the New Testament. It is a very important part of the message that Jesus has been preaching about and his followers have continued to talk about...just like Paul here in this Corinthians text.

The greatest thing, the most important thing is love. We need love. We need God's love. God needs our love. Our

neighbors need the love that God has given to us for them. We need to love ourselves. We need to take care of ourselves.

We can take care of ourselves in a variety of ways. First, we need some time to ourselves. Jesus would go off and be by himself for forty days. John went out into the wilderness. These men went to be by themselves and take the time to be in prayer. They needed to be re-energized both physically and spiritually. It is like those times on vacation when you get away for a few days and then you find yourself sleeping in longer than you had expected...that is if you aren't on a family vacation and have

children to wake you up....and that rest that you get is just your body telling you that you needed some time.

Jesus and John and all of us should be going away to have time for prayer and time for that Spiritual rejuvenation as well as the physical rest. I'm not saying that you need to take a week's vacation and go to some desert or the wilderness or some cave somewhere to be in quiet, solitude and prayer. You can if that would be uplifting for you, but you don't need to be far away from your normal life and routine.

Some people find spiritual time just by being in a separate room from the rest of their family and it could listening to music

or reading a good book (it doesn't even have to be a "spiritual book" but one that you find peaceful and restful---even if you like a good suspenseful mystery or romance).

You can also find time for restfulness by being with other people. This may seem counterproductive, but you can surround yourself with like-minded, non-stress building individuals that will allow you to get some energy back.

Every year there is a clergy retreat that a number of pastors in both the PSEC and PNEC go to in order to "get away from church life" and listen to a speaker/presenter and network with other pastors. It also doesn't hurt that there is a golf course,

gym, and pool at the resort where this event is held, but when I attend that retreat it is a way to rejuvenate my energy and my Spirit just by being with other clergy who are also in need of the same thing.

If you find spiritual uplifting or rest and rejuvenation on the golf course, go for it. If you are like me and argue with the ball and your clubs at about every other hole, it might not be as restful for you.

There are many opportunities for clergy to find rest with other clergy and retreat, but lay people and regular church members can also find opportunities and time to be with others

to refresh your spirit as well. If you are interested in a Spiritual retreat, let me know and I will work to find you something that might be uplifting for you.

You can also take time for yourself by helping others. One thing that I find fulfilling is helping at the food pantry. It is very fulfilling to me to know that there can be over 100 families that we help to support with food that should last about a week or two. It might not be restful to be working at 7 am on a Saturday morning, but it can be uplifting.

Our spirits need that fulfillment in order to also take care of ourselves. Many people can feel “good” about helping others

and our energy and our emotions can be changed for the better when we do things for others.

Another scriptural reference for the need to take care of ourselves and rest is found In Genesis. We are told that God created for six days and then took a rest. Even God, in God's infinite power, energy, and love, God still took a break.

Can you imagine God talking to one of God's angels during the creation? It might sound something like this:

God says to his angel, "Do you know what I have just done? I have just created a 24-hour period of alternating light and darkness on Earth. Isn't that good?"

The angel says, “Yes, but what will you do now?”

God says, “I think I’ll call it a day.”

During our times of break and quiet, we can take time to be in prayer and growing our faith in God and maybe laughing at a humorous joke made by the pastor during his morning sermon.

During our time of quiet, we can be contemplating what it means for us to be busy. How can we give more time to our family, our church, our God, and most importantly even ourselves?

There are many ways that we need to take care of ourselves. Scripture tells us that we need to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. This is only if we have the love to give. This is only if we have the energy to share.

It has been said that no one can pour from an empty vessel. Without energy and love within yourself and taking care of yourself, then you cannot give of yourself to others.

As the busy-ness of our lives gets in the way of...our lives...we sometimes don't do a good job of self-care. Help yourself to help others. Don't get too caught up in your life that you don't take time to rest and rejuvenate. We are called to

serve God and serve each other, but don't forget...to take care of yourself, too. Amen.