

**“Stand Up”**  
**August 25, 2019**  
**Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church**  
**Baltimore, MD**  
**Rev. Michele Ward**

It is so good to have the whole team back together this Sunday. Last week, Gretchen Van Utt transitioned out of her role as our sabbatical support clergy. Her work with us as a community was so meaningful, and I am forever grateful for her time here at Brown in that role. At the same time she was preaching her final sermon of the sabbatical, I was engaging in some rest of my own at the Well-Being Retreat, an annual retreat that is sponsored by the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation. The theme for that retreat was “Life is More,” taking from another passage in Luke about God providing for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. I spent a lot of time taking care of my holistic well-being. They had financial advisors, a dietician, a yoga instructor, pastors, and experts in emotional resilience to meet with the pastors and their partners. I am so grateful for the privilege I have to access resources like that to take care of my whole self. And on Friday, the staff had a representative from the Board of Pensions come and discuss all the benefits we have through our various insurance offerings to make sure we are accessing all that we can for our daily well-being.

Andrew spoke about the understanding of Sabbath being for the other according to the prophet Isaiah and to Jesus. Friedman offers another perspective about how we relate to each other as individuals and as groups. And Luke tells us a story about a woman that Jesus heals on the Sabbath, a choice that many in his community said was the equivalent of work. In true postmodern fashion, I believe that Sabbath is about both the personal and the communal.

You see, I don’t think Jesus could stand it when he saw the woman bent over. I don’t think he could enjoy his Sabbath when he saw her, unable to look up or stand straight. And so he did something about it. He knew that his well being was tied up in the wellbeing of this woman. I cannot be whole until all of us are whole. A Haitian proverb says, “*Mein anpil chay pa lou.*” “Many hands make the load lighter.” I believe this is true. I also believe that we cannot bear our part of the load if we are not taking care of ourselves. The reality is that we each cannot bear the same amount of the load, as much as we would like this proverb to be entirely true and equitable. This is what makes Jesus’ choice to take some of this woman’s part of the load, easing the load off her back, a challenge to our quid pro quo culture.

When I think of sharing the load for one another, I think about our teambuilding day here at Brown. During July, we had an entire Sunday dedicated to teambuilding exercises with the group Outward Bound. We were supposed to spend the day at the park, but due to the weather we moved

everything inside. One of the activities we did was about communication. Each team created a human centipede. The person at the back was the only one who could see. We each had to communicate using hand signals or taps all the way through the human chain to the person at the front who was blindfolded. This person had to locate objects on the floor and then place them in a bucket. This might sound pretty straightforward, but it was much harder than it sounds. During this exercise, it was very easy for some of us to get fixated on winning or communicating correctly. It was also slow as all get out.

But afterwards, during our reflection with the facilitator, I realized that it didn't matter as much that we all achieved a certain amount of wins during the exercise. What mattered was learning how to communicate with one another. When Sabbath is not about achieving rest, like something we can check off a to do list, then we are truly in the moment individually and corporately. When bearing more of the load for someone is not something we do out of duty, but we do out of deep compassion, then we are practicing Sabbath. When we do not get caught up in rest as a task to complete but see it as necessary as breathing deeply, we are embodying what Isaiah and Luke wanted us to understand: when we are each more fully whole, then we are more whole together.

So what kind of wellness is missing from your life? How do you approach rest? How can sharing the load with one another compel you to a deeper sense of your connection to God, to yourself, and to each other? And--I encourage you to reflect on sharing the load without harming yourself. Sabbath is meant to be rest for all, not for some. May you live with the courage to reach out as Jesus did and to stand up as the woman did. *Mein anpil chay pa lou*. Many hands make the load lighter.