



Resting With God

A Multi Sensory Worship

Service Offered on November 13, 2016

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On November 11, 2016 I had the honor and privilege of developing and leading the contemporary worship service at Second Congregational Church, UCC in Attleboro, Massachusetts (known as to congregants and the community as Second Church). Since this is my home church where I am a member in discernment and also have been Christ Education Director for six year I am innately in tuned with the general feeling of the congregation as well as individuals in the congregations. As Christian Education Director it is my job to read the congregation and try to develop curriculum to help the congregation work through moments and help guide their unrests back toward God and the teaching of Jesus Christ. For a while I had been observing that the congregation as a whole and individual adults as well as children where having trouble focusing and being present in worship. As I began to listen to people stories I heard things like: “I’m working none stop and I have so many other things on my mind.” And “There’s so much to be done, I am just here because my children want to be her for Sunday School, but I should be home getting things done.” Youth were telling me, “I have so much home work I just don’t have time to be in church.” And Children where feeling the pressures of the family time crunch.”

Having all ready been invited to write and lead the November 11<sup>th</sup> contemporary service I decided I would incorporate some of what I have learned in our practicing faith class into a service a Sabbath service, designed to introduce smalls ways to center ones self on God’s presents everyday, called “Resting With God.” Second Churches contemporary worship service is a multi-sensory worship that involves a visual Keynote presentation and a praise band. The service in many ways still follows the flow of a traditions service as it follows a structure of: call to welcome, announcements, passing of

the peace, an opening prayer, a praise song, prayers of the people, scripture reading, sermon, two praise songs, a benediction, and a final praise song. But because Second Churches contemporary service does not distribute printed bulletins collaboration between myself, the Music Director William Macpherson, and the praise band became crucial to make sure everything we wanted to congregation to say or sing was in our Keynote presentation as well as work out transitions and basic flow of the service. With the service written and all worship leaders aware of the mechanics of the service, on Sunday November 11<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm we were ready to invite congregants to join us in the sanctuary for worship.

In preparing the sanctuary for the service I knew I wanted all members of the congregation, including the youngest among us, to be able to sit comfortably with there feet on the floor, I brought some chairs form a Sunday school classroom into the sanctuary for my young friends to sit on. With everything set we opened to the doors to the sanctuary and invited the congregants to worship. The service began without any technical issues and the service flowed smoothly through to the end. If you where an outsider looking in you may have felt that this service was nothing out of the ordinary. But for myself and the small group of congregants that attended the service seemed to be a bit more than average.

As the worship leader I had never lead a worship of this style. Second Church's contemporary service is a laid back informal service. Congregants as well as the praise band and myself are encouraged to come dressed comfortably in causal dress. And the feeling right away is a sense of relaxed comfort. This relaxed atmosphere lent it's self well to the theme of the evening and opened congregants up to the possibilities of

exploring something new. As I said the service started without any hiccups and I felt very comfortable in the setting to allow myself to relax and be comfortable in knowing my words were inspired by God. As I lead the opening prayer and sang the first praise song, I noticed a young boy and his sister sitting the chairs I had brought up for them playing with a couple of crosses made out of sticks and clay and made a mental note to ask them about their treasures after service.

As the service went on and I came to the quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>1</sup> I could see and hear congregants relating and connecting with the words I was speaking. The reading of Heschel's quote led into my sermon<sup>2</sup> as I flowed through my sermon and was speaking about ways that I find Sabbath moments in the gym the young boy with the cross raised his hand and at the same time just began asking, excitedly, "Do you mean you feel God helping you lift weights at the gym the same way I felt God holding my hand tightly on the zip line at school so I didn't fall off?" Normally in a sermon I would not acknowledge an interruption and would have kept moving with my thoughts. But this interruption felt different, this was a child that is usually very quiet and afraid to speak out that had a moment of connection. While affirming his revelation the young boy again excitedly asked "Are you also talking about that feeling I get when I'm a little scared and I ask God for help and I can feel God jump into my pocket and stay with me until I'm not scared anymore?" Yes I affirmed and seeing that this boy was satisfied that his connections to God had been affirmed I was able to use the young boy's connections to God to segue into a one minute guided meditation for the congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> See worship outline below for the full quote and bibliographical information.

<sup>2</sup> See worship outline for a manuscript.

As the congregation found a comfortable position in their seats the sounds of rolling ocean waves<sup>3</sup> played softly in the background. As the congregation stilled, including the youngest among us, the room fell silent, except for the sounds of the rolling waves you could not only feel the calm come over the group, but you could see the release of tension in the congregants body posture and on their faces. For me God's presents had entered the room along with us at the start of worship but while the group sat motionless you could almost see the Holy Spirit moving among the congregation. Weaving it's self between and around the congregants and at times spending a few extra moments warmly wrapping it's essence around a couple members who I know needed a little extra affirmation of God's presence.

As my phone timer counted the final few seconds for the meditation minute I realized I had forgotten to turn the volume off on my phone. As the timer sounded I rushed to silence it and looking up I noticed the most of the congregants has not even noticed the disruption. I allow them to sit for a few extra moment and began to guide them back into the space. As the congregants regained there awareness of the space around them they where invited to join in signing "Amen" which lead right into the singing of a praise song the young boy with the cross signaled for me to come speak to him. While the congregation sang the praise song the young boy explained to me that while he was walking to church with his family he found to stick and used the small bit of clay he had in his pocket to make crosses for him and is sister to have so God could be with them where every they went. He asked if he could share his treasure with the congregation. Again, this being a little boy who is usually very shy and reserved I told

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<sup>3</sup> This sound effect has been imbedded in the Sermon slide on the Keynote presentations.

him he was more than welcome to share. As the song finished this little boy climbed the stairs of the alter and with no microphone in a voice loud enough to fill the very sanctuary he proudly explained and displayed his cross to the entire congregation. Not missing a beat at the climax of the applause and excitement the praise band began the next song. It was almost as if the entire moment had been scripted but I assure you as I assured everyone after service that moment was in way scripted and completely the work of God moving among us in the moment.

As I read the benediction and the praise band began the final song, while everyone was signing and dancing a young girl signaled me over and “said something doesn’t feel right. I think we are God wants us to happily carry God’s light out of this room.” Until that moment I had not noticed that there was no one to extinguish the candles and carry the flame out of the Sanctuary. I quickly ran and got the candle snuffer and as I carried it back into the sanctuary the young girl reached out a hand, with a gleeful look in her eye asked “may I do it!” And she beautifully ended the service by leading us out into the world with light of Christ.

It is my belief that God was truly present with us that evening. Through the innocent revelations of a young boy who found the courage to speak out loud, to a young girl reminding us to bring God into the world. I knew as the service concluded the congregation had at least for a few moments caught a glimpse of a Sabbath inspired by God. But it wasn’t until the weeks following that I fully understood the impact the service had on the congregants present that evening. In the weeks that followed I was approached by a number of people thanking me for the service. It was expressed that many of them had never thought that even taking a minute out their day to reflect and be present to God

be so rejuvenating for their soul. Many congregants have also expressed, after their experience in service, a desire to form a daily Sabbath support group. The idea is use text messaging to connect as a group each day with simple reminders to take a moment of Sabbath, to share scripture to reflect on, as prayers to be mindful of and as a means in which to share how they practiced Sabbath that day to give others ideas for their own daily practice.

What I have discovered through my observations of this congregation over time, and through developing and leading this worship service is a need and longing for a further understanding of how to practice Sabbath daily as a means to not only for congregants to reconnect with God themselves, but also as a means for congregants to support and connect with each other. In our busy lives it becomes easy to forget to recognize God in the smallest corners of our lives. And it becomes even easier to move through life isolated in our own lives. What I have witnessed if the weeks flowing the service is the congregants that were present are still exploring and wrestling with finding Sabbath in their lives. They are longing for it and are seeking to develop these ideas further.

While each of the children's revelatory moments in service may seem small and insubstantial knowing each of these children personally I know that they were speaking from a place of inspiration. What these two children offered in the service were moments of insights of how God was speaking to them. I believe that children at times are closer to God than we as adults are. Their innocents leaves them open to observing and witnessing God's presents in ways we as adults are not in tune with. By allowing them to express

themselves we are allowing ourselves to open up to possibilities we ourselves have forgotten to explore.

I was blessed to have the opportunity to develop and lead Second Churches Contemporary worship service on November 11<sup>th</sup>. But what I feel truly blessed about is having the opportunity as Christian Education Director to now take the feedback I gained from the service and develop further opportunities and out of the box ways to educate, engage and promote Sabbath practices in ways that are manageable, and meaningful in today's context for the congregation of Second Church. While Sabbath practices are as individual as each person that is practicing it, when the congregation comes together to find ways to support each other it becomes an entire congregational practice. It is my hope that by continuing to explore ways to connect in Sabbath practice among the congregation it may one day expand beyond the four walls of Second Church and may find a place in the wider community as we seek to lighten the burden of an overscheduled life on our children's, families, and communities well being. This service has been a blessing that continues to unveil itself as discussions continue around it.

**Worship Outline:** This is the out line that was used to develop the service. This outline cites all of my sources and contains footnotes. The Keynote slides are not footnoted because it would have been too much information for me to sort through while I was leading the service.

**Welcome:**

Welcome to Second Congregational Church, where All are welcome, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, all are welcome to exhale the internal breathe that carries the stress of life and to inhale the life giving breathe of God<sup>4</sup>. All are welcome to set aside what our eye perceives and our figures can touch as we reclaim time and worship as God Has taught us.

God is God!

All the Time!

All the Time!

God is God!

**Announcements:**

\*Please join us in fellowship hall for a simple Soup and Bread supper directly following our worship serve.

\*Save the Date: November 20<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 at Murray Universal Unitarian Church for the ACCC Interfaith Thanks Giving Service to Honor the Attleboro Police Department for their Leadership in Unconscious Bias Awareness.

Are there more announcements related to the faith and order of Second Church?

Seeing none Let us **stand and pass the peace**.

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<sup>4</sup> The exhaling and inhaling of the breath is adapted from the community chapel (Placeholder2) welcome on Wednesdays in Marsh Chapel.

**Opening Prayer:**

I invite everyone to pray:

All gracious God, gentle in your power and strong in your tenderness, you created us in your likeness and breathed into us your life giving breath. Teach us how to rest in your spirit and to be present to your word as we follow the teaching of your son, Jesus Christ.

Amen

**Music:** For Those Tears I Died

Words and Music: Marsha Stevens

Copyright EMI, 1969

**Prayers of the People:** adopted from Rev. Kelly prayers of the people<sup>5</sup>

Loving and Merciful God, We are grateful for all of the gifts of grace you bestow on us each day. We thank you for this church and for the times we gather in your presence. We thank you for all your blessings and praise you for the wonders of creation.

Loving God, when we come to time of doubt and fear, encourage us.

Strengthen us by our faith and enable us to live our lives in a way that brings glory and honor to you. Enable us to release our internal breath that holds so much stress and breath in your life giving breath as we learn to rest in your spirit.

May our faith in you and our gratitude for all that you have given us, lead us to love and serve others in your name. This afternoon we are especially mindful of those who are in need of our prayer and love; those fighting illness and disease, those facing doubt, and those whose reason is troubling their faith.

Lord, be with those who are confused, comfort those who feel unwelcomed, and warm

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of the people format is adapted from The Reverend Kelly Thibeault, Pastor of First Church, UCC, in North Attleboro, MA prayers of the people format.

the hearts of those who have been hurt by the words and opinions of others.

We ask your blessing on those in our prayers and all those in need of your care as we lift our prayers verbally or silently within our hearts. At this time I invite you to lift your prayers...

We pray that you sustain, redeem, and encourage all those in need of your gentle touch today. Bless us with a strong faith. Bless the leaders of all countries and all the men and women who serve and have served in the military. Keep them safe we pray.

We ask all of this in the name of Your Son, and our Savior, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying...

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**Scripture:**

This afternoon's scripture Old Testament reading is from Genesis 2:1-3 and our New testament reading is Mark 2:27

Genesis 2:1-3

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. **2** And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Mark 2:27

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath;

**May the Lord God add a Blessing to our readings**

**Time: The Sabbath by Abraham Joshua Heschel**

“In our daily lives we attend primarily to that which the senses are spelling out for us: to what the eyes perceive, to what the figures touch. Reality to us is thinghood, consisting of substances that occupy space; even God is conceived by most of us as a thing.

The result of our thinginess is our blindness to all reality that fails to identify itself as a thing, as a matter of fact. This is obvious in our understanding of time, which, being thingless and insubstantial, appears to us as if it had no reality.

Indeed, we know what to do with space but do not know what to do about time, except to make it subservient to space... Time to us is sarcasm, a slick treacherous monster with a jaw like a furnace incinerating every moment of our lives...

It is impossible for man to shirk the problem of time. The more we think the more we realize: we cannot conquer time through space. We can only master time in time.

The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments... What is retained in the soul is the moment of insight rather than the place where the act came to pass... Spiritual life begins to decay when we fail to sense the grandeur of what is eternal in time...

We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel. *The Sabbath*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979. 5

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

**Sermon:**<sup>7</sup>

“We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”<sup>8</sup>

It is not a thing...but a moment that gives significance...

I don't know about all of you but lately it seems like moments are hard to come by. I like many of you find myself at least once a day saying “I need more time”...”There's not enough time”...”where did time go?”<sup>9</sup> In a culture and a society that cherishes wealth and material things over time, we are bound to feel constantly over worked, over whelmed and flat out exhausted.

“And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.”<sup>10</sup>

“On the Seventh day God rested, he finished the work he had been working and God rested.”<sup>11</sup> God's work was not done, The sun and the moon where still figuring out when one should set and the other should rise, the water and dry land were still fighting over boundaries, The fish in the sea and the birds in the sky were still not quite sure when to flap or to cost. The sheep where feuding with the cows over which one gets to eat the sweetest grass in the field, As for the humans, well for now they were quiet in the garden. On the seventh day God rested, God seeing that creation, while still needing a bit more work, was very good so God rested. God knew that in order to be present to creation, in

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<sup>7</sup> This manuscript was a base for my sermon. As sermons tend to do at some point I walked away from the manuscript and just spoke as the words came to me. While I cannot remember exactly what I said in the moment, I have been told that what I said was not far off from what is written in this document.

<sup>8</sup> Heschel, *The Sabbath*. 5

<sup>9</sup> Inspired Dr. Wolfeich's Sabbath class Spring 2016

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 2:1 NRSV

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 2:1 NRSV

order to manage all that had been created in a calm, patient, loving manner God needed to rest.

We, you and me, we know we can not be present to our lives, we can not be calm, patient, or loving unless we rest, unless we center ourselves to hear and present to how God is moving within our lives. But yet we still keep working, we still keep pushing through when we know we need to stop. After all if we don't keep going who's going to pay the mortgage, for the car, for the boat, ETC.? Who's going to buy Christmas gifts? If we don't keep going to, how will we..., Who's going to...It's exhausting.

Our culture has programmed us to just keep going, but God demonstrates a rest. Society tells us that rest is an option, to be great...to reach our dreams...we must keep going. In a society that puts a premium on material wealth how are we to find rest, how are we to practice Sabbath. In a society that pushes us to our limits, were loose sight of who we are and what it really means to a caretaker of Gods creation it is up to us to find ways to connect with the still speaking God. It is up to us to root ourselves in creation and to feel Gods power moving within us.

Just how we do this is has become a very personal thing. With a material world competing for our attention on Sunday's just how we find Sabbath becomes a personal thing. Last semester one of my professors challenged our class to develop and maintain a Sabbath practice. At the time this challenge seemed almost impossible. How could I a single mother, balancing being a full time seminarian, working two part time jobs and being a mom find an entire day to devote to Sabbath...Well I gave up on a full day of Sabbath, I took inventory of our lives and decided Sabbath was something that would happen daily for us. Every night from 6pm to 8pm is Sabbath time. We pray and eat

dinner as a family, and then we rest, we rest with each other. We may play a game, we may talk about what our observations of life, or we may just rest together. Homework gets put away, phones don't come out. We are present to each other and to what how God is moving within us in the moment.

I also found the gym. While many people would argue the gym is not a place of Sabbath, it is not a place to pray and be present to God, It is for me. To lift properly you must be present to your body, you must leave everything that stresses or distracts you at the door. When I started lifting my Trainer taught me to lift properly you must ground yourself in Gods creation, you need to screw your feet into the floor, feel the ground under your feet. As you lift feel God's strength powering you up from the ground. When I lift I am reminded that while I have strength it is also Gods strength that pushed me that last little bit.

“We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.”<sup>12</sup>

“It is not a thing...but a moment that gives significance...”<sup>13</sup>

In our materialist lives it becomes hard to find Sabbath. We are challenged to find new ways to connect and to present with God. To breath in Gods Life Giving breath and to exhale that which is stressful.

In these busy times I invite you all to take a moment and rest in God. I invite you to sit with God, to screw your feet into the floor and to exhale the internal breathe of stress and breathe in god's breathe of Life. I would like to invite you all to sit with God, imagine yourself sitting in one of these. As we sit rooted in Gods creation imaging what

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<sup>12</sup> Heshel, *The Sabbath*. 5

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 5

you would say to God, would you say anything at all or would you simply just sit with God? We will sit with God for about a minute. After the minute I will guide our awareness back into the present and as we enter into the present we will sing Amen 5 times. Our songs of Amen will lead us into our closing benediction and Music of Celebration

I invite you all find a comfortable position as sit rooted in Gods Creation.

Begin the waves background music while people get comfortable. Begin meditations when most of the fidgeting stops. DON'T FOR GET TO START THE STOP WATCH!!!

Sing Amen 5 times

**Music:** I Stand in Awe:

Words and Music: Mark Altrogge

Copyright People of Destiny International, 1988

**Music:** I Will Call Upon the Lord:

Words and Music: Michael O'Shields, paraphrasing Psalm 18

Copyright Sound III, 1994

**Benediction:**

May God's Holy Spirit lead you.

May God's Strength protect you.

May God's peace be with you.

Go now in the name of God, by the grace of Christ, and with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen<sup>14</sup>

**Music:** Shine, Jesus, Shine:

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<sup>14</sup> *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ.* Cleveland : United Church of Christ, 2012. 126

Words and Music: Graham Kendrick

Copyright Make Way Music, 1987

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