

Melanie Rosa Life Lessons from Summer Vacation
Lakewood UMC
Ephesians 5:15-20

July 26, 2009
Genesis 2:1-4

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Now, I am a firm believer in vacations. But there was a time in my life when this was not always the case. Earlier in my ministry I rarely used all of my vacation time each year, and did not even take a regular day off. Of course in those smaller churches I served, I did not have staff to cover things, so I did a lot of things myself including the bulletin, newsletter, and so it was harder to get away. But it was also to a large degree, due to my arrogance in believing that I was indispensable and that the earth might fall off its axis if I did not stay charge of everything. Nothing would get done without me! Or at least it would not be done as well. Over the years I have seen the complete folly of that attitude and learned that nobody is indispensable. I not only need that time of rest and renewal, but I am not nearly as effective without it. If I am burned out and tired and irritable I am not going to be a very good pastor for you, or a good wife, mother, friend. And to have a vacation, you don't even have to leave town. I have stayed home during time off and it was great. And now, with this economy "Staycations" are increasingly popular, where you take day trips and sleep in your own bed. The important thing is to have a change of pace, unhook from your frantic schedule and take time to nurture your soul. So, I am a vacation enthusiast because it is essential that we make the time to renew our souls and relationships. And it just so happens that God is a firm believer in vacations too.

The book of Genesis has two different accounts of the creation of the world. The first account tells us how God said "Let there be light and there was light, God created the sky, waters, heavens, earth, trees, plants, animals, birds, all living things. And God did it in just 6 days. That was quite a week for God. And then God did something unusual. Listen to this account from Genesis, chapter 2:

"Heaven and Earth were finished, down to the last detail.

By the seventh day God had finished all of the work of creation.

And on the seventh day God rested.

God blessed the seventh day and made it Holy.

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God rested! Even God needed to take a break, to have a change of pace. You would not think that God would need a rest, but if God rested then so should we. It is essential that we take the time to renew ourselves, time to nurture and nourish ourselves. So if you have not yet taken a vacation this summer—do it! Go to Elitches or the Botanic Gardens or Rocky Mountain National Park or Legoland or Wally World, or the Corn Palace, or to see the worlds largest Ball of String—this is an amazing state and fascinating country! .

Today marks the final sermon in this Life Lessons Series, and I wanted to share with you some of the things I learned from my summer vacation.

First of all, you have to be flexible. Things will never go exactly as planned, but that is what makes them interesting and memorable. The camping trips and hikes I remember most are the ones where it rained, where the food was ruined, there were scary animals, and at the time I was miserable. But looking back those were great experiences.

And if you travel with anybody besides yourself, you **really** have to be flexible. Even on vacation other people will not always be happy or easy to get along with. They say the true test of a friendship is to go on a vacation together, especially on a houseboat. People have very different values, ideas and agendas.

I remember our trip to the Grand Canyon several years ago, where I wanted to just sit for hours and take it all in—this marvel of God’s creation. I wanted to be there at sunrise and sunset and everything in between. We got there and showed this miracle of nature to our children and do you know what they said? “Wow, that’s cool, now what is there to do here? Are there rides, restaurants, a swimming pool?” They thought the Grand Canyon was boring! People see things very differently, and you have to honor that somehow, even when you want to strangle them. Traveling is an experience that under the best of conditions brings setbacks and changes and challenges, and you will fare better if you can roll with the punches.

And you can never depend on the weather, as we saw so vividly last Monday evening. It was truly a miracle that there were no fatalities in that bizarre storm. I know many of you suffered incredible damage to your trees, homes and cars and were without power for days. But you cannot ever control the weather,

and vacations remind you of that quite vividly. We went to Disney World in the pouring rain, even Mickey and Minnie were nowhere in sight. It was cold and dreary. But in the Magic Kingdom who cares? The lines were short.

We also thought about going to Cape Canaveral to watch the launch of the Space Shuttle Endeavor, with 7 astronauts headed to the International Space Station. But the launch was postponed six times because of the weather. Over the years people have asked me to pray for good weather for outings or weddings and I tell them that is something I never do. It is a mysterious universe beyond my control.

Another thing I learned was that no matter where you are, there is a lot happening on Sunday mornings! I had two Sundays off, and I am ashamed to tell you that I did not go to church. I like to visit other churches, and I usually do, but this time I did not. I thought about it, and I said my prayers and did some devotional reading. I realized that it is a very rare luxury for me to be lazy on a Sunday morning. I do NOT recommend it for you, however. I do miss all of you when I am away, it feels strange not to be with you on a Sunday morning after all these years. But no matter where you are Sunday morning, there is a lot going on. The stores are full, parks are full, restaurants are full, people going about their lives. There is a whole world out there, and it made me realize what a sheltered life I lead, at least on Sunday mornings!

Another thing about vacations—it is important to take them even if you do not feel like it. There have been times when I scheduled time off to do something and I really did not feel like it. I was sad, depressed or worried about something, and taking a vacation was the last thing I cared to do. Taking a trip to scatter the ashes of my mother or sister did not feel like a vacation at all. But when I do it anyway, I find that I can be renewed, even with a heavy heart. I can find peace and rest, even when my mind is in turmoil. It is so important to take time to allow your soul to catch up to your life. To stop the frantic activity and enjoy a different rhythm of life, which helps to facilitate God's healing grace and power.

Secondly, do not wait until you can afford a vacation, because that day will never arrive. I have had quite a few people tell me how much they regret not taking that cruise because they were waiting until they retired, or not visiting their childhood home, or not visiting the grand children more often, and then it becomes too late to do it at all. It is important to do it, whether or not you feel like it or think you can afford it.

In that spirit, I did something on my vacation that was totally uncharacteristic of me. I am usually a very cautious person, but I went parasailing, flying like a

bird 1200 feet over the Gulf of Mexico! (Pictures of me parasailing) You have a daredevil pastor!

On a more serious note, and at the heart of why I believe in vacations is to underscore the enormous importance of having a balanced life and not being defined by your work. There is so much more to us than what we do. Now that may be a lesson that does not apply to you, but it is very important for me. To a very large degree I do define myself by what I do. I am on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and I have been a Minister 25 years now, and my mother was a Minister, so this work is in my blood. I identify with it completely, I love it and cannot imagine doing anything else.

But it is **not** my whole life, I am also a wife, mother, sister, friend. I am a swimmer, hiker, camper, reader. I have hopes, dreams, and interests and things I would like to learn and do that have absolutely nothing to do with being a minister! I realize how important it is to live into the fullness and variety of life in all of its dimensions, and that means learning how to play, relax, how to BE instead of DO. There is so much more to all of us than our professions, productivity or earning power.

And that is what our faith teaches us—we do not have to do anything, accomplish anything, we are loved as we are for who we are. And our church is trying to help you understand that and inviting you to live a more balanced life. Our hiking group is a smashing success, and those who participate have a wonderful time exploring areas of God's favorite state.. We have groups that are meeting for concerts, meals, a Rockies Game, in addition to our many Mission opportunities. We want to help you enjoy this good life and have some fun while doing it! So get involved and you will be blessed.

Additionally, what I learned once again on my summer vacation was just how fleeting these special times really are. This could have been our last family vacation, who knows if our kids will want to take vacations with us anymore? Probably not. Only our daughter was able to go with us this time, and the days with her are numbered indeed. And as I thought back on all of our camping trips and vacations, I realized how quickly it all passed. Even those fights in the back seat of the car—"He touched me with his stinky feet!" "She's a cry baby!" Oh, how I miss those days.

A reminder of the fleeting nature of this life came when I saw people on the beach in Florida making sand castles. They would spend hours and hours creating sand sculptures on the beach. Some of these are quite elaborate, taking

hours and hours to create. There is a guy named Randy Hoffman who creates sculptures which are extraordinary. These eye-catching works of art are 8 to 20 feet across and commonly have a Christian theme. They depict things such as Christ on the cross, The Last Supper, Jesus praying, David and Goliath.

These sand sculptures will be washed away within a day when the tides come in. So all of that work and effort for something that would vanish like the wind. But ultimately there is not a single thing in this life that is permanent. Here today, gone tomorrow, taken by tide, rain, wind, or death.. The impermanence of this life is indeed why it is so precious and so beautiful. As Isaiah says, "Life is as grass, and the Grass withers and the flower fades, but God endures forever." Life on this earth is so fleeting and fragile.

Every time I do a graveside burial I share these words from our Book of Worship: Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust. This is based upon a long Biblical tradition, beginning with Genesis 2, where God creates Adam from dust of the earth. Then later, after Adam has sinned God tells him: "You were created from dust and to dust you shall return." It is a vivid reminder that we are all only here for a little while. We are dust and to dust we shall return.

It is humbling indeed to think of ourselves in this way, especially for those of us who hate to dust! I wonder if you have seen the poem "Dust if you Must?"

It reads, in part:

"Dust if you must, but there's not much time
 With rivers to swim and mountains to climb
 Music to hear and books to read,
 Friends to cherish and life to lead.
 Dust if you must, but there's a world out there
 Feel the sun in your eyes, the wind in your hair,
 Get out in the wind, snow and rain.
 This day will not come again.
 Dust if you must but bear in mind
 Old age will come and it's not very kind
 And when YOU go, and go you must
 You yourself will make more DUST!"

Not a very pleasant thought, but it's true. Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust. How easily we forget about that.

Now, I want to close this sermon with a reading from the letter to the Ephesians. Here Paul encouraged the Christians in Ephesus to pay careful attention to their lives. He admonished them to live intentionally, to make the most of the time they are allotted on this earth. Paul wrote:

“Don't waste your time on useless work, busywork, and the barren pursuits. Expose those things for the sham that they are. Wake up from your sleep, climb out of your coffin and live in the light. Watch your step, use your head, and make the most of every chance you get.”

We live carefully and intentionally because we know that we are here only for a very short time. My advice to you is take a vacation and reconnect with your soul, the people you love, and with God. For when you do you will discover God's beauty inside you, around you, and beyond you.

On the seventh day God rested. And that was very, very good.

Let us Pray:

Eternal God,

This earthly life is such a precious gift. Forgive us when we take it for granted. Forgive us when do not love it enough. Help us to find balance in our lives and to take time to renew our souls and nurture our relationships. Help us to see ourselves not in terms of what we do, but who we are, not what we produce, but how we are blessed that we might bless others in return. Teach us to embrace the fleeting nature of your creation, and to have faith in you goodness and grace. Amen.

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