

**Rev. Maeve Hammond**  
**“The work of rest and mercy”**  
**Psalm 3, Matthew 8:18-20, 25:34-36**  
**February 2, 2024**

[Slide with three images] “Rest saved my life. This is my truth. I don’t need anyone else to verify this nor do I need complicated theories to support what I know to be true in my heart, my body, and my Spirit. My pilgrimage with rest as a form of resistance and liberation practice is a deeply personal one....My commitment to rest as a form of resistance came from my everyday experience of being a part of the machine-level pace of our culture” (Hersey 2022).

Tricia Hersey wrote this passage in the preface to her book, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*, published in 2022. Hersey calls herself performance artist, writer, theater maker, activist, theologian, and daydreamer. In 2016, she founded The Nap Ministry, “an organization that examines the liberating power of naps,” from her website (2024). Along with promoting the theological and philosophical power of naps on social media, Hersey and her team create performance art out of rest. She organizes “site-specific installations, and community organizing to install sacred and safe places for the community to rest together,” again, borrowing from her website (2024). Her ministry’s “signature program...installs sacred spaces for the community to nap together,” complete with yoga mats, blankets, music, an altar, and a talk-back session (The Nap Ministry 2024). In the slides, you’ll see an example of one of her installations. [Slide with Tricia on the bench] This is a photo from The Nap Ministry’s website, featuring The Nap Bishop. She’s outside, dozing peacefully on a wooden swing, wrapped in summery, flowing white and bright yellow chiffon, her feet bare and her right arm outstretched.

[Slide with three images] Here is the good news that The Nap Bishop, Tricia Hersey, preaches: “rest is a form of resistance...[and] sleep deprivation [is] a racial and social justice issue” (The Nap Ministry 2024). In seminary, Hersey felt the weight of her studies, societal expectations, and ingrained cultural anti-Black racism and trauma impeding on her everyday life and lifeforce. She, then, chose to reclaim her health and sense of self by resting. As she puts it,

“I saw no other way to make it” (Hersey 2022). She napped all over campus and when she came home (Hersey 2022). She has incorporated rest into her life after seminary, and her life’s work is encouraging everyone to give themselves permission to rest and incorporate it into their mental, physical, and spiritual health practices. As Hersey puts it, “I refuse to push my body to the brink of exhaustion and destruction. Let the chips fall where they may” (2022).

Today, after worship, several members of the congregation will come together in support of our annual Build-A-Bed event. If you don’t know what Build-A-Bed is, or if you need a refresher, the title gives it away: it’s an event where we build, by hand, beds for children who don’t have access to a bed of their own. A Bed for Every Child, an initiative of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, coordinates Build-A-Bed. As their website states, their “mission is simple yet essential: provide beds to children in need, improving their quality of life and chances of success” (2024). I want to take us to a universal experience, one you may have even experienced this morning: you reluctantly drag yourself out of bed, put on the first clothes you find in your closet (or, most likely, from a pile on the floor next to your bed), and plod over to the coffee pot to pour yourself, as Dolly Parton would say, “a cup of ambition.” Wiping the sleep from your eyes and checking the early hour on the clock, you think to yourself, “man, I did *not* sleep well last night.” How do you feel for the rest of the day? Not only tired or sleepy, but you may also be irritable, impatient, emotional, bored, distracted, or even achy and sick-feeling. Now, think about when your kid or a kid you’ve babysat stays up way past their bedtime or misses their afternoon nap.... Yeah, not a pretty picture. What if this was how you slept every night, or a majority of your nights? I’d imagine we’d all struggle with our emotional, mental, and physical health, lack the energy to keep up with our peers and friends, and find it difficult to concentrate and be present. A Bed for Every Child tries to address and mitigate sleeplessness in our wider community, “fueled by collaborations with community partners, schools, and healthcare institutions, driving impactful changes and promoting the well-being and

academic achievement of underprivileged children...who lack proper sleeping arrangements” (2024).

*Rest is resistance.* Rest is Tricia Hersey’s resistance against our culture of exploitation, overwork, and white supremacy. Rest is A Bed for Every Child’s resistance against structural and economic barriers that affect the wellbeing and health of children in the Boston area, our neighbors. It is a mercy to give ourselves not just the gift, but the human necessity of rest. It is a mercy to use the energy we have to give others the gift, the human necessity, of rest.

You may have heard of the seven corporal works of mercy, especially if you’ve come from a Catholic tradition. In Matthew 25, Jesus lists these works, reminding us of our call as Christians to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead (Matt. 25:35-36). You’ll see some artwork of the seven corporal works of mercy by Sarah Fuller on the screen. I have a copy of this print in my office. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks to how we each can nurture the humanity of another person. Christ calls us to give our resources, time, and energy in the pursuit of nourishment and community care. We extend Christ’s mercy by recognizing and tending to human needs: hydration, sustenance, shelter, warmth, companionship, and after-death care. Is it possible, though, that we could add rest to these seven works of mercy? Perhaps, you’ll notice that rest *already* exists implicitly in them. When we eat in the company of others, when we extend ourselves to give and receive friendship, when we donate what we have in the service of others, do we not already feel a sense of restful peace? Do we not feel that, for a moment in our service, the world inside and around us slows down a bit, almost to capture the sense of ourselves in the midst of a much larger, beautiful connection?

A few chapters earlier, a verse in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 8, reads, “Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’” (Matt. 8:20). In the context of Jesus’s story in this gospel, he confronts a scribe who longs to become one of his disciples with the harsh reality of his ministry. I hadn’t thought of it

like this before, but Jesus and his disciples are, essentially, unhoused for much of his years in active ministry, as he travels around the ancient world preaching, healing, and accompanying communities. I wonder how precious rest would have been for Jesus and his disciples. Every provided or shared meal, every chair or bed or, even, spot on the floor must have meant the world to these travellers. It's interesting to think about how Jesus's life ended in a parallel way to how it started: he and his loved ones following the divine call to *keep moving*. How could he, Mary, Joseph, or the disciples have survived others' works of mercy and works of rest? Yes, Jesus's ministry required movement, dedication, and labor. But, think about the moments we also see Jesus resting—eating with his community, drinking wine, taking a nap in a boat with his disciples before he calms a storm in all four gospels, withdrawing to grieve privately after John the Baptist is killed, praying alone, taking a break by Jacob's well (where he encounters the Samaritan woman), among others.

“May the ground underneath hold us, and if we must collapse, may a soft pillow be there” (Hersey 2022). This is one of The Nap Bishop's benedictions. May this be true, and may we also resist overworking ourselves. May God show us how to give rest to others, but never forget to give rest to ourselves. May we treasure the moments of peace and quiet we long for as humans and caretakers of this earth. “ 5 Now I can lie down and sleep, and then awake again for you have held me—6 No fear now of those tens of thousands who stand against me wherever I turn. 7 Arise, God! Save me, my God!...8 From you, God—deliverance; to your people—blessing” (Ps. 3:5-8). Amen.