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A Glorious, Decadent Gift

By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons

“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.” John Lubbock, The Use Of Life

“A waste of time.” Maybe someone out there is motivated to “get moving” after hearing this uncomfortable phrase, “a waste of time,” but mostly, I think it’s used to ruin perfectly lovely, lush reveries.

Maybe there are moments when we need to hear it, but it has never motivated any person I know to rouse them out of bed in the morning or to turn off a glowing, hypnotic screen. Or even to get myself moving.

What set off my thoughts about “a waste of time” and “rest” was a recent visit to California after Easter to see my daughter and her family. Like so

many others, I hadn't seen my family in over a year — I was anxious to hold them and get caught up, especially with the grandkids.

And the grandkids were almost as excited to see me as they were about the pool their parents were putting in the backyard.

What a joyous reunion! And the two weeks I had set aside was plenty of time to be with them, as well as to visit friends in the Bay area.

But then, as I settled into the visit, the need to just sit and read trash novels or let my mind wander overwhelmed me. Riding bikes with the kids, going to the playground for climbing, or cooking and talking with mom and dad, were truly pleasures. But calling friends to meet for lunch in San Francisco, or taking a short trip to see the Sequoias, or even just going to Sacramento to visit a museum were too much. So, of course, I tried guilting myself into doing something which served to simply make me irritable with myself.

I sorted myself out once the pool opened about five days into my visit. The kids could finally swim, which was madness because while the weather was sunny, the outside temperature was no more than 65 degrees, and not exactly swimming weather if the pool isn't heated.

The kids were adamant – they were going to swim. They didn't care if it was cold. And they relentlessly cajoled us “sensible” adults into jumping in with them. They convinced their grandfather into driving up to be a part of the official opening, and “to bring a swimsuit.”

On the appointed day, we all gathered around the sparkling, chilly pool for the first swim ever. Only the kids and grandpa were willing to get in the pool. Three of us were going to stand at the edge and take pictures. On the count of three, in they went. The shrieks of excitement, happiness, and shock that followed made us all laugh. The kids were delighted to finally be able to swim in their own pool, and grandpa realized with shock and good humor how cold water can be.

Their joy was so infectious that mom and dad jumped in after them – clothes and all! I resisted the thrill of joining them, assuring them – and me – how important it was to capture it all on video.

Later that night, still glowing and delighted by the day's excitement, I went out to sit alone by the lighted pool. Words of scripture -- the fourth of The Ten Commandments — washed over me:

“Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God;” (Exodus 20:8-10).

Sabbath. That's what my soul was asking for – rest. And it's a commandment.

God commands us to rest. For the whole 24-hour day. And it's so hard to seize the call to rest as seriously as we take the other Commandments. Perhaps we think we need to do something productive so that when St. Peter asks us when we last did something useful, we have something to say. It never occurs to us that St. Peter is going to want to know when we last laid in a hammock all afternoon watching the clouds float by. We have trouble *not* doing something.

But we have the power to fix this. Our sabbath may not be completely like the discipline the Pharisees demanded of the Jewish people of their time; it may look different from anyone else's. The real discipline – commandment – is learning to rest in God. To seek and experience that profound love, peace, and joy revealed to us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let's relish this glorious, decadent gift.