Falling Back: On Rest and God's Time

On Sunday, November 1, most of us will set our clocks back one hour and receive what morning people everywhere celebrate as an "extra hour." I have been thinking about that hour.

Actually, I have been thinking about how tired so many of us are. As I travel among our congregations, I keep meeting faithful people who are running on empty: lay leaders who have stepped into roles they never imagined, committee members who have read the same budget three times, hoping it will read differently, pastors carrying congregations through transitions, and members quietly grieving what their church once was while working hard to preserve what remains. Weariness, I have learned, is one of the most honest things a congregation can say out loud — and one of the rarest.

So, when the clocks fall back, I want to suggest that we do something more radical than simply enjoy a longer morning. I want to suggest that we fall back — deliberately — into the rest of God.

The lie of the full calendar

We are a people who have learned to measure faithfulness by activity. If the calendar is full, the ministry must be healthy. If the building is busy, God must be pleased. Somewhere along the way, many of our congregations absorbed the culture's creed that our worth is our productivity — and we baptized it.

But Scripture keeps insisting on a different rhythm. In the creation story, God rests — not because God was tired, but because rest is holy. In the wilderness, God commands Israel to stop gathering manna one day out of seven, even though the people were hungry and the food lay right on the ground. The Sabbath command was not a reward for finishing the work. It was a practice of trust, written into the body: you are not the one holding up the world.

There is a reason the manna story comes right after the people complain about hunger. Anxiety makes us hoard. Fear tells us to gather more, work more, meet more, and worry more. Into that anxiety, God says, essentially: stop for a day and watch whether the world falls apart. It will not. I will still be here in the morning.

An extra hour is not a command to fill it

I confess that my first instinct on a morning with an extra hour is to use it — to answer one more email, review one more profile, or get a head start on the week. Perhaps yours is similar. We have forgotten how to receive time as a gift rather than as an assignment.

So let me offer a modest experiment. When the clocks change, take the hour — all of it — and do nothing useful with it. Sleep. Walk the dog slowly. Drink the coffee while it is still hot. Call the friend you keep putting off. Sit in the pew before anyone else arrives and just watch the light. Pray, or simply be quiet, which for many of us is the same thing.

This is not laziness disguised as religious language. It is a theological claim: that our congregations, ministries, and conferences belong to God, not to us; that the work will still be there tomorrow and God will be there too; that our bodies, which God called good, are not obstacles to ministry but instruments of it. An exhausted church is not a more faithful church. It is usually just a more anxious one.

The season of lengthening shadows

There is something fitting about this hour coming as the evenings grow darker earlier. The church year is turning. We are moving toward Advent — the season that does not flee the darkness but sits in it, waiting and watching for a light that darkness cannot overcome.

Our culture responds to early nightfall with bright lights, busy schedules, and the relentless cheer of the consumer season, which now begins before the Halloween candy is cleared from the shelves. The church, strangely and beautifully, does the opposite. Advent teaches us to sit with longing, to name what is not yet right, and to wait for God's timing rather than demand our own. The psalmist puts it plainly: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Stillness is not the opposite of faithfulness. Sometimes it is faithfulness in its purest form.

A word to the weary

This is my word to the tired ones — and I know you are many: the lay leader holding more than your share, the clergyperson who cannot remember the last time you truly had a day off, the member who shows up early and stays late, wondering whether anyone notices. God notices. And God's invitation is not "do more." It is the invitation Jesus offered the crowds and still offers: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

May this season of turning clocks be, for you and your congregation, a time of turning toward the One who neither slumbers nor sleeps — so that you can. Fall back, friends. The world is in steadier hands than ours.