

In her auto-biography, *Textbook Amy Krouse-Rosenthal*, Amy concludes with the following multiple choice question:

“In the alley there is a bright pink flower peaking out through the asphalt:
A) it looks like futility.
B) it looks like hope.”

My high school choir was minutes from performing when all of a sudden our director was called away for an emergency. Thankfully, our school band director was also a parent of one of my classmates and stepped in to cover. He only had a few moments to look over the music and then he huddled us together and said, “This piece has a lot of rests in it. Remember that rests are just as musically important as the notes. Perform the rests like you’d perform the notes. So when your rests come up, perform them with your eyes, how you focus, and in how you breath. You help the audience pay attention to how the rests are used with your eyes.” I don’t remember anything else about that performance... or the day... I don’t even really remember what grade I was in... but I remember that. Resting, especially in the tension is part of anticipating the musical resolution.

It’s not only that resting is part of the music, or that resting helps us all pay attention to what the music is doing, it adds space for us to “be” in-between the build-up of tension and the relief of resolution. Musical rests are there to grab our attention, and we are missing the point of we don’t give those rests the attention they deserves. So when this summer’s theme of “Resting” in Mark was proposed, I couldn’t escape the idea of “resting” in a musical sense – and its relationship to paying attention– because Mark’s timing, rhythm, and perspicacity set up those themes so beautifully.

In chapter 11, Jesus and his group of followers arrive at Jerusalem. Now, if we’re paying attention, Mark begins to give us explicit time-markers... even dates. It was the week before Passover, Palm Sunday. It was five days before Passover; four days before; three days... and then it was two days... and then Mark tells us it was the day before Passover. Mark is giving us the beat. For those paying attention, Mark is helping us march in step with God’s rhythm.

In fact, Mark explicitly tells us to pay attention just before his narrative begins its final crescendo leading to important moments of rest. Mark told us in the very passage Peter Neimier preached from last week (Mark 13:32-37). There, in a parable, Jesus instructs people to “watch.” The Greek word there is “*gregorete*” and it means to “pay attention,” “to watch,” or to “keep awake” -- like a watchmen or a lifeguard... or a choral singer. It’s more attentive than simply “looking” or “seeing,” and here again, Mark demonstrates some meticulous intentionality for those paying attention. Up until chapter 13, Mark never uses the word *gregorete* (watch), instead he uses the word “*blepo*” which means “to see.” Jesus encourages us to all develop “eyes that blepo (eyes that see) and ears that hear, and an open heart” so that we will have the necessary equipment and abilities to watch well and to discern. So from chapter 1 to 13 Mark works on developing our abilities to *see* – but from chapter 13 to the end, Mark encourages us to watch – to pay attention. “Watch/pay attention/keep awake” Jesus says, “for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: ‘*gregorete*.’” Jesus is instructing us to pay attention from evening to morning – exactly the time when watchmen are on duty and attentiveness is needed... even while we might be resting, because God is conducting his symphony even while we rest and to perform that symphony well, we must pay attention.

If we’re paying attention we’ll notice that Mark’s changes the tempo yet again in the *next* chapter. Starting in Mark 14:17, instead of events happening one day at a time, Mark begins reporting events in 3hr segments, starting with the evening Passover meal. Jesus’ last night on earth will play out in four 3hr scenes, and this one’s the first, it all begins – just like the Jewish day begins – “in the evening.”

The word “evening” in Greek can also mean “sundown.” It’s not just a description of the time, it’s also a term used to denote a “watchmen’s” shift of the night. In our world, we divide the day into three 8hr shifts, but they divided the day into eight 3hr shifts – four in the day, and four through the night. The first shift, or watch, of the night was called, rather uncreatively, the “evening” watch and it last for 3 hours, starting at sundown – usually around 6pm – and went until around 9pm. We name our shifts too, that’s why our 3rd shift, which covers the night, is sometimes called the “graveyard shift.” They, on the other hand, had the evening watch. They also had the “midnight watch” which went from 9pm till midnight; the “Rooster Crow” – by far their most creative name - from midnight till about 3am; and finally, the “sunrise” or “morning” watch from around 3am to 6am. These terms would be as familiar to Mark’s readers as the terms “1st, 2nd, and 3rd shifts” would be to us.

And sure enough – the four stories Mark tells about Jesus’ final night all correspond to these four watches. Jesus’ final night begins “in the evening” and the final scene of Jesus’ last night, begins “in the morning” in 15:1. In that third scene, the time marker is difficult to see, but not to *hear*... Simon Peter heard it... it’s the rooster crowing after Peter’s denial. That’s the third watch of the night – the “Rooster Crow watch.”

Now, the only remaining watch of the night – The *midnight* watch – is harder to discern. It’s the focus of this morning’s passage. Now, if we wanted, we *could* easily calculate the time. After all, we’ve already had scenes take place in the other watches of the night, so by the process of elimination we could deduce that *midnight* watch was the only shift left to place a scene into. Likewise, we could calculate that Jesus goes off to pray for one hour three different times, therefore, these must be the three hours that make up the *midnight* shift from 9pm to midnight. But this is Mark we’re talking about. He’s insightful. Mark has Amy Krouse-Rosenthal-like perspicacity... that flower-through-the-asphalt-like clarity of hope and understatement.

Mark’s the Gospel writer who understands that Jesus’ Kingdom is shrubby. It fulfills all the prophecies of Jeremiah’s mighty Cedar tree – providing shade for all birds under heaven to find rest – but is nonetheless a shrub. Mark *gets* the beauty of Jesus’ shrubby Kingdom. It’s mundane, bland, and understated awesomeness. But, you’ve got to have eyes that see, ears that hear, and a heart that’s open in order to watch for *that* kind of beauty and brilliance.

Unlike the religious elite of Jesus’ day – who, for all their disagreements, universally agreed that when God’s Kingdom arrived we’d all know it – for Mark, Jesus’ Kingdom ISN’T in-your-face spectacular. Jesus’ Kingdom is the kind that shows up and almost *no one knows it*. It walks out of the desert and is baptized by John in the Jordan, just like everyone else. It’s like a mustard seed that shrubbily fulfills Cedar-like prophecies. Sure Jesus’ Kingdom parades into Jerusalem and the Temple like a king, but then it just looks around for a moment and departs to Bethany. It does its most majestic events unmajestically. And if you don’t understand that shrubbiness, you’ll have a hard time understanding why a crucified King is victorious. But it’s just so shrubby... it’s so un-spectacular that if you’re not paying attention, if you’re not watching you’ll miss it. If you don’t *rest* well, if you’re not in tune, on beat, in sync with God’s

symphony you’ll miss it. Because, as Jesus already told us in his parable in chapter 13, it comes unexpectedly, without fanfare.

And that’s a huge part of what Jesus’ last night is all about – the majestic fulfillments that one must be watching closely to understand what has transpired. And Mark, in his brilliance, helps us by telling us the time. Not just what time it is, but what *KIND* of time it is. After all, why do we call it “the ‘graveyard’ shift”? That’s not just the name of a segment of the clock, it’s an idiomatic descriptor. The graveyard shift is lonely, it’s isolating, and dark, and dismal... that’s the *kind* of time it is. Mark’s using his time-markers to convey themes as well.

The first scene which takes place “in the evening,” at sundown. That’s the *time* it is – the sun is descending and the world is darkening. Light is dimming, and sure enough, in that scene Judas’ betrayal, the disciples’ abandonment, and Peter’s denials are all in focus. Jesus provides a contrast to these themes by eating with his betrayer and the soon-to-fail disciples. He even predicts future redemption, but despite the introduction of communion, the themes are mostly dark... as the sun goes down. Or look at the third scene. It’s a wake-up call moment. Peter is awoken to his shame by the rooster. We also have a chance to wake up to the deeper realities of Jesus’ identity as the one who responds “I Am,” if we’re paying attention. And that’s what Rooster-calls are for – time to wake up. Or look at the final scene. There, Jesus’ fate is sealed. The crowd turns on him. He takes the place of Barabbas and is handed over for crucifixion. On one level it is brutally sad but for those paying attention, in his understated, Krouse-Rosenthal-like hopefulness, Mark’s time-marker communicates an understated type of victory. It’s *dawn*, the dawn of something new as the sun rises. Even though Jesus’ life is about to end, if we are attentive and recognize the true shrubbiness of the moment... light is breaking in. In each of these scenes, if we’re watching closely, we should recognize that Jesus is the one who is in tune and in tempo with God’s symphony. And that’s especially true in the scene at midnight, in the Garden of Gethsemane. And as before, Mark tells us the time.

There, in Gethsemane, just before midnight, God’s symphony builds to its highest tension, punctuated by multiple rests and resolutions - both for Christians and for Jews. Jesus goes with his disciples to the garden, he takes Peter, James, and John aside and gives them a specific command, one that *we’ve* heard before: *gregorete* – pay attention, stay awake, watch. He goes a little further, throws himself on the ground and prays “Abba – father,” (the only time in the Bible Jesus calls God “Abba” – kinda reminds us of when Abraham’s son Isaac asked, “Abba, where is the sacrifice?” Isaac asks that question on the very hill which Gethsemane overlooks, Mt. Moriah – where the Temple stands). Jesus continues his prayer “Abba, father, for you all things are possible; remove this fate from me; but, not what I want, but what you want.” *That’s* following the conductor... matching with what God is doing. Then Jesus returns to find Peter, James, and John sleeping. They are “resting” but not the way they should. They’re not playing in tune, on beat, or paying attention as they were directed. So he says to them again (and to Peter specifically), “*Gregorete* and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again, Jesus goes a distance away, prays the same prayer for another hour, and returns to find the trio asleep yet again. A similar interaction ensues, but they have no response. Then the pattern repeats a third time.

Now, there’s a lot we could extract from this story. Perhaps some of us would benefit from reflecting on how Jesus prays three times and then concludes God’s answer is “no.” Paul did the same thing when praying for his own impediments, for a thorn to be removed from his side. I’m not sure the Bible is establishing a standard for prayer, but it might be a helpful correction to the temptation to try to wear God out with our prayers, and establish some limit after which we reorient our lives to match what God

is doing... because that'd be *following the conductor* too. But *for today* at least, let's focus on the “rest” - the pause following the tense build-up, just before the resolution, and it happens in the most understated, mundane manner, in the phrase, “enough, the hour has come.”

“Enough” in this instance could mean that Jesus has reached his limit of the disciples sleepiness - he's had enough of their lack of attentiveness, or that he's finished with his prayers - he's prayed enough, the answer is “no.” But the Greek word for enough can also mean something like “sold” – as in, there's enough to complete the transaction. And sure *enough*, Jesus' next thought is about his betrayal and “immediately” Judas arrives to hand him over. Likewise, the word “hour” here can just mean “moment,” as Jesus remarks that the “time has come.” But when Jesus says, “the hour has arrived,” what time *is it*? Have we been paying attention? Have we been keeping watch of the time?

Jesus and his followers ate the feast of unleavened bread during the evening watch, from 6-9pm. Then Jesus and his followers went to Gethsemane around 9pm, where he prayed for 3hrs. So what hour *has* come? Midnight! But this isn't *any* old “midnight.” This is the most important midnight on the Jewish calendar... it's midnight of Passover... the very moment when God rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. And *that's* exactly what *kind* of time it is!

Every year, at Passover, the Jewish people would turn their attention towards Jerusalem. The city had been occupied by foreign powers for centuries. The Jewish people had long lived under the yoke of imperial powers, but Yahweh is a God of rescue! From the Pharisees to the Zealots, they all believed that God would send the Messiah to free them... *someday*. What better time for God to rescue them again, free them from oppression, then at midnight, on *Passover*. We have a similar inclination – that's why when we celebrate advent, we commemorate Jesus' first arrival and look forward to his second coming... cause wouldn't it be perfect for Jesus to come back in time for Christmas? Likewise, the Jewish people, year after year, generation after generation, would include some hopeful Jews who would stay up... keep awake... keep watch... on the annual night of Passover. Maybe *this* year will be the year. And invariably, every year they'd go to bed with that Kraus-Rosenthal-kind of hopefulness... “maybe next year,” because, after all, when the Messiah finally comes to rescue us, we'll all know it – right!?

And *here*, in the garden, across from Mt. Moriah, in the shrubbiest, most understated way possible, Jesus has told us “enough, the hour has finally come.” ...And the first-born son - the Passover lamb - is sold and handed off for the slaughter. And he goes *willingly*, in tune and on beat with where God's cosmic symphony is going. And from here on out, Jesus mostly plays “rests.” He plays mostly rests when on trial. He plays mostly rests when condemned. He plays mostly rests when on the cross. And then he *rests* in the tomb until the symphony brings relief and resolution.

If we've been watching closely... paying attention... then we've seen exactly how to this musical tension is built and will be resolved. If *we're* in-tune, on beat, watching the conductor then we can play our part too. By the way, the Hebrews have a word for being in-tune, on beat, and in sync with God's cosmic rhythm. They call that *hochmah* – and we translate that Hebrew word as “wisdom.” So, if we are wise, if we've trained our eyes, ears, and hearts to be able to watch closely and perform our rests attentively, then we can join in the symphony and watch... for our part to play may *also* come in the *evening*, or at *midnight*, or at *rooster-crow*, or in the *morning*.

Here's to the shrubs!

Watch at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qyVS7LEnvM>