As some of you know, when I was younger, I suffered a stroke.  I lost feeling and control of my life side.  Thankfully, I'm totally healthy today but a few minor setbacks remain. One of which is that when I'm fearful, the left side of my face can droop or my left side can go limp, curl or freeze up.  This is one of those stories.

My friend and I were hiking in a developing country when we encountered an obstacle that would have meant turning a five-mile hike into ten if we did not cross. So how did the chicken cross the road?  Well, I would have to balance myself on a 2 x 4 and walk thirty feet. Sounds simple enough except that ten feet below was something bubbling, something horribly stinky, -- poop.

My friend, in his confidence and grace, glided across the plank and over the sewage canal swiftly and easily.  Many of you have seen my dance moves, I move with no such grace.  I took a deep, disgusting; sewage polluted breath, and stepped out to walk the plank.  I'm on a wobbly piece of wood, twenty-nine feet from my goal and I couldn't help it-- I looked down.  No, don't look down!  Just then, my left leg froze.

In search for support and confidence, I looked at my partner who found a three foot stick and pointed it in my direction. Thanks, but there was still about twenty six feet between my hand and the stick. He was laughing too hard to offer any support. So the journey began. I stepped with my right foot, wobbled a little, then dragged my right. My right foot was strong. I played soccer growing up practiced many-a-short with that foot. Mussel memory. Another step. Drag. And so on. This went on for, well it felt like eternity. At times, I wanted to crawl into a ball or to slither across it like a snake anything to compensate for my left leg. It just wasn’t working. It gave out on me during the most crutial point in my life. When else would I balance on a 2 x 4 over a sewage canal?

**My mind tried to channel every Disney movie star attempting such a brave move but I had a sense of panic. I hadn’t slept much the night before and ran a bit too far that morning. My body was woozy. If not from the smell, from my empty stomach. We dashed out of the hostel early in the morning and skipped breakfast. So, here I was about to gag, dizzy.. (I’m struggling to connect this. Do you think the next paragraph is enough or still too much of a stretch?)**

“But, Ms. Buccola, why would you tell an embarrassing, poopy story in Chapel?” – One might ask. Well, Benedictine writer Ester de Waal says, “Recently, society lives with less and less of our whole selves…” She goes on to explain, little by little, parts of our lives are forgotten, dragged behind, and ultimately paralyzed because they aren’t considered important to a “successful” future.

**Without practicing focused, intentional steps, I couldn’t go anywhere. My mind willed me to get across the poop pit. The rest of my body was ready to finish the balance routine. I had faith this would not be my ultimate fate, but my leg held me back. I needed to be intentional about my forward movement, I needed to slow down, spend extra time on leg, and refocus. (Delete?)**

Society today pushes us to drill full speed ahead, sacrificing sleep, family time, friends, and sometimes all sparks of joy and peace to produce perfection. But why? What’s the purpose? When making these sacrifices, is your mind, body, or spirit sending warning signs about loss of joy, meaning, or connection?

St. Benedict felt this loss of joy, meaning, connection, and purpose. While studying in Rome he was surrounded by wealthy students competing to get ahead. The rich were becoming powerful on the backs of the poor. People were frivolous with their money and resources. Politicians were making decisions to Benefit themselves. Does this sound familiar? St. Benedict fled to a cave.

When living in solitude, he prayed to God and pondered humanity. He created guidelines for communities, devoting equal importance to nurturing the mind, body, and spirit. He developed a schedule for monastic communities that invited time for prayer, work, and studies. He made time for communal life and solitude. Time for sharing and silence. He believed that what we practice becomes part of us and that these practices are sure signs of our priorities. So he developed a monastic schedule to create habits of purpose, peace, and joy.

**Body**

In Benedict’s day, holy people would nearly starve themselves to prove their faith and love of God. Others prayed at all hours of day and night. St. Benedict was my kind of man! He wanted his monks to guard sleeping hours and eat plenty in order to be strong enough to work, study, and pray while being patient enough to serve one another. He said, “We hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome” and later said “all is to be pursued in moderation.” Don’t those words belong in a health magazine?

Raise your hand if you are an athlete. YES! Student-Athlete. I tough job. Really. We must balance study, downtime, sleep, and timely, nutritious meals. That’s a difficult task. We know that our bodies are strongest after a good night’s sleep and that our muscles recover with protein and carbs. We know we have to practice to develop muscle memory.

St. Benedict knew these things too. He wanted his monks to be strong enough to work in the fields, study, and pray. He wanted strong monks who could reach their full, unique potential, to develop all parts of themselves.

**Mind**

**I need a transition or story.**

Benedict believes that education is supposed to help us develop skills for the workforce, but he didn’t want his monks to only be skilled workers. He wanted them to be life-long learners. He wanted them to spend time reading and engaging in philosophical discussions each day. They were, and are, scholastics. In this way, Benedict suggested that the purpose of education was more than developing tools to achieve a high-paying job. He believed that the purpose of education was to develop a routine, a love of learning because that is an integral part of our being and helps us reach our full, unique potential. In developing routine and training our minds, we become aware of humanity and ultimately aware of God’s work in this world, in our lives, and in our hearts.

***Reading – Spirituality for Everyday Living (39-40)***

**Spirit**

**Need a transition**

**While driving on 101, listening to “This American Life” on NPR, I noticed a fancy flashing billboard with a load insurance advertisement and then seconds later it switched to a beautiful picture taken with an iPhone. Awe, visual peace. Then BAM a powerful image of a hungry child. Then I noticed more and more billboards on all sides. My phone started ringing. And cars and trucks zooming past. AH! I had to pull over. (Delete)?**

Unfortunately, overstimulation has become the norm. Facebook, instagram, Snapchat, Netflix, ITunes, YouTube. We are lost in a whirlwind of noise, images, and words. Our own thoughts and voices are drowning.

St. Benedict asks us to be intentional about ways we spend our time and energy because what we practice is who we become. Benedict asks us to turn off the noise at scheduled points in the day. He asks us to sit and be. Yes, that may mean to sit and be bored. But studies show we actually develop more brain cells and establish more mental connections in moments of silence. Benedict asks us to regain control of our minds, bodies, and hearts. He asks us to reject the temptation to pick up our phones, turn on our shows, Facebook, etc. He scheduled times of silence for his monks so they could find joy in what is instead of constantly searching for what they would like.

In these moments of silence, monks find powerful moments of gratitude and joy. They meet together five to seven times each day to sit in silence, to pray, and to remember their ultimate purpose. Together they reach for their full unique potential. Together they aim to serve each other and God. Throughout their day, they are reminded of the root of their joy and their commitment to continual growth.

This is one reason we celebrate Chapel each week, begin class in prayer or silence, and ring the prayer bell at lunch. In these ways, we remind ourselves to regain control of our minds, bodies, and hearts. In these ways, we give thanks for pure joy and every part of ourselves (mind, body, and spirit).

“The rule is to keep a favorable environment in which the balance of life may flourish (Seeking God: Way of St. Benedict, p86)”

**I need to loop back around to the sewage story.**