

Jason Emberger – First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction, CO
February 17, 2019
Stop, Collaborate and Listen

Luke 6:1–11, Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15

This morning we continue in our teaching series: 24. And for those of you who may be new or are just joining us this morning, we are looking at the concept of time. Specifically a day, and time in light of God's eternal timeless perspective.

Last week, the focus was on Psalm 84:10, "better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere". And we heard from others in our faith community about the ways in which people have experienced God's presence and power on days, in moments, and other periods of time they wouldn't trade for "thousands elsewhere."

And speaking of time, last week was one of those days where I really wish I was able to split time and be in two places at once. But while you were hearing and sharing here I was with our students at winter camp and for me, time with our students up on a mountain in the snow connecting with God and one another was a one of those "better is one day" moments for me.

And maybe last week as you heard from others, you were encouraged, maybe inspired. And maybe you began thinking about and remembering your own experience of one of those moments in your life. A day or time in which you experienced a profound sense of God's presence. Moments you were overwhelmed by His love and filled with joy and peace.

Well, I believe moments like that do not have to be few and far between or a distant fond memory but are days and moments we can experience regularly and more daily and I find this connects so much with what we are going to talk about this morning. And It has a lot to do with a day blessed by God and made holy or set apart from other days. A day that truly is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I am talking about Sabbath. And whatever your experience or practice or understanding of it may be, Sabbath is most often associated with the word rest.

What's interesting is that the Hebrew word outside of any context simply means: Stop! Stop what you are doing. Stop what you are saying. Whatever you are doing- **Stop**.

But it is in Genesis that this word Sabbath takes on a new meaning and a deeper significance. It takes on a period of time . A day. We discover this sabbath in the context of creation. As God went through the work of creation- speaking, working, creating the world and universe and all that is to be we arrive at the seventh day and God did what? He rested.

2 *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.* **3** *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2-3)*

God rested. He "sabbathed".

Now that's an interesting thought. God rested. What does it mean for God to rest? Because when I think of rest I associate it with something I need after a long day of work or something I need because I'm exhausted. As a parent It feels more like a magical and mystical unicorn, that is rare and impossible to find.

But we are talking about God. God almighty who was, and is and is to come. The all-powerful, all-present, all knowing, all everything God who does not sleep and does not get tired (at least physically).

God's rest means something very different from what rest means to us. Right? God's rest means a change of activity. We see God move from creation to reflection. God's rest means He steps back, reflects and simply enjoys and savors the beauty and completeness of His creative work. (yard work and house work example)

It means He was satisfied with His work of creation and it was "very good."

I really like how author Reggie McNeal puts it:

Work gave way to evaluation. The pause signaled a shift for God from writing the score to rehearsing the piece. God's Sabbath, then, did not mean a cessation of activity, but a different activity. (Work of Heart, 141)

We also see God's rest, His Sabbath, is not something that happened outside of creation but sabbath and rest itself were created by God and are part of the very creation rhythm itself. Work and Rest.

I believe this was the rhythm of life in the garden, life for Adam and Eve. It was the God created rhythm of life that God intended and created us to live into. Work and rest. Rest and Work.

Work itself is not the enemy, though at times it may feel that way. But Work was part of the creation-rhythm and was introduced before sin.

Adam and Eve were told to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it. To work the garden. And God says it was all good. It was very good. Work and rest, rest and work. This was the creation-rhythm and the rhythm of life.

That means when we neglect this and violate the rhythms of work and rest in any direction it leads to extremes. Extreme tiredness or laziness, chaos, over-stressed, over-worked, overindulgent, burned out people. God created Sabbath for Us! We need it.

We find that by the time we get to Exodus and Deuteronomy (our passages this morning) God includes Sabbath as a command for His people. In fact it is so important it makes the top 10, coming in at number four here. (First 3= relationship with God, Last 6=relationship with other, Sabbath as pivot commandment)

This command and instruction was needed and given because sin (our sin) has a way of distorting and complicating everything. It effects every good thing, including work and rest. It has a way of causing us to forget. Forget who God is, forget who we are and to forget all that He has done.

So this God given command is not just a rule to restrict, but is a reason to remember.

It is the same commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy but you may have noticed the reasons given to Sabbath are different

The reason to sabbath we find in Exodus is because God did it. God worked and then rested.

The reason we see in Deuteronomy is because of the 400 years Israel spent in Egypt as slaves. Their lives and their identity were nothing more than tools to be used and abused, but now they are longer slaves and no longer have to work non stop. God has delivered them.

Reminds us- God as creator and God as Savior.

So God gave the sabbath command and instruction as a gift and as a blessing. But as with so many things that God gives us as gifts and good things ,we end up taking those things and we distort, twist them, even manipulating them into something far from its original purpose or intention.

We turn it from a blessing to a burden. “This is why we can’t have nice things”- You ever hear that phrase.

This is a reality parents know all too well. Right.. The child with the marker set “helping” to color in the photo album, or the shattered heirloom hand painted plate on the wall because kickball in the house was a great idea!

When I was a child my parents got my siblings and I each a pet hermit crab. “What a wonderful gift” my parents probably thought. “A sign of our love for our children.” Easy to take care of. A nice reminder of our family trips to Ocean City, N.J. Well they were wrong.

One of us decided our hermit crab needed freedom and let it loose in the house. Only to be discovered a few weeks later by a smell you can never forget as it had gotten stuck behind a bookcase where it spent it’s freedom.

And little Jason thought a round of tennis with the hermit crab was a good idea. I’ll spare you the details. “This is why we can’t have nice things”

God gave the Sabbath as a gift and a blessing. A reminder of God’s provision and His love. A rhythm of work and rest.

But as we see by the time Jesus came on the scene and as we read in Luke, the sabbath had been so distorted and so removed from it’s original purpose and intention. It was no longer a blessing but a burden. It had become so bogged down with rules and restrictions.

And for a day that was supposed to be about not working, people sure had to work real hard just to not break any sabbath rules .

So what did Jesus do? Jesus exposed the distortion of the sabbath, and all its legalistic and religious minutia. He then began to restore it as the gift and blessing it was created and instructed to be. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and so he can do that sort of thing.

In Mark's gospel account of this same story, Jesus reminds the Pharisees and teachers of the law and anyone else who is set on keeping the Sabbath from being the joyful thing, God created it to be by making it a day of rules and regulations- "sabbath was created for man(people), and not people for the Sabbath.

In all of this though Jesus wasn't abolishing sabbath or doing away with it but restoring it back to the design intended when God put into motion the rhythm of creation. Work and Rest.

As Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the law including the Sabbath making it, and because of what Jesus came to do and his work of Salvation at the cross, Sabbath is so much more than just a day. Then just a limited definition of what is work and what is not. So much more than, do's and don't, or oughts and should not's.

It's all about Jesus and time spent focused on Him The one who saves us from our sin and is making all things new. Transforming our hearts and lives. The Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of Rest! True rest.

He invites us into that rhythm. His rhythm of grace. His rhythm of work and rest.

Come to me all who are weary, all who are burdened and I will give you rest!

I love the Message translation of Matthew 11:28-30.

28-30 *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

Sabbath is a gift from God. Blessing not a burden, freedom and not restriction. When we rightly understand Sabbath, it becomes an invitation, not an obligation, one of the most life-giving commands and practices God graciously gives to us.

And so to help us understand it and answer the question, what does it mean for us or look like today? I am not going to give a formula or a list of should and should not's but instead I want to identify some principles of sabbath that can be applied in any number of ways.

Stillness and Solitude

I find that sabbath begins in a posture of stillness and solitude. **Stop and to listen.** Stillness is doing what we read in **Psalm 46:10.** **"Be still and know that I am God."** In stillness we experience God who is at work, who continues to keep His creation going as we rest.

In stillness: **We remember that God is God and we are not.**

Ruth Haley Barton puts it this way *"the first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the creator. God is the only one who is infinite. I am finite which means that I live within the physical limits of time and space and the bodily limits of strength and energy. There are limits to my capacities relationally, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. I am not God. God is the one who can be all things to all people. God is the one who can be two places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. I am not."*

Solitude is communion with God. Time spent listening and allowing God's voice to speak louder than all of the competing voices. He speaks our identity to us. In Christ, because of His death on the cross and resurrection we are no longer slaves to sin, no longer slaves to fear but we are His beloved Sons and Daughters. God's voice tells us who we are!

Henri Nouwen says:

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self

It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world. Solitude is the place of our salvation. Hence, it is the place where we want to lead all who are seeking the light in this dark world. "

Rest and Reflect

This ties in and even overlaps with the principle of stillness and solitude.

Rest seems to be an obvious principle of sabbath and yet we don't know how to do it well or we get hung up on how to define it. The beauty of rest is that it is unique to you and what brings you rest. Easy way to look at it is, decide what is work in your life and don't do that.

Don't compare your rest with what others do for rest because it is different. Rest for me can be spending hours on a trail, running and hiking up and down a mountain where for someone else that sounds like a lot of work. If you are in an office all week then rest may look like being in the garden. If you do a lot of physical labor then rest may be taking a nap.

Rest looks different for all people and even changes at different stages of life. My kids don't always know how to rest and so I try and model for them and also enforce rest times. That may be a nap or family outing.

In our Wednesday in the word, some mentioned about being retired. Even in retirement there is work to be done and routine, things you do because you have to do them. And so whatever that is, change it up, do something different. Something with no agenda than just being.

Reflect- Sabbath is an opportunity to reflect. Reflect on God and His blessing of creation. Pause and reflect on the week or days or moments previous to your sabbath. How did you grow? Where did you struggle? Where have you experienced God? Blessed?

Life is not just about doing but also about being. Rest and reflect help us do this.

Work and Worship

You might be thinking what does work have to do with Sabbath. The thing is you can't have sabbath without work. This goes back to the creation rhythm. Work and Rest. The two are not in opposition of each other but work together. The two need each other. (Peanut butter sandwich)

Along with that, when we live into the creation rhythm of work and rest and when we sabbath we are actually collaborating with God and participating in and completing the creation rhythm of work and rest. We keep time with God and collaborate with Him

Sabbath is also an act of worship. In worship we take the focus off of ourselves and direct it toward God. We worship God our creator, our savior.

Work can easily be something we get stuck in. Something we continue to do more and more of as we put our value and identity in our work. "If I work more than I will be a better person". So we end up worshipping work. We make it about what we do and how successful we are. The more work we do the better we are.

Sabbath is the opportunity to break away from worshipping work and to work at worship.

Sabbath is the seam between the world of work and the world of worship, bringing the two together into rhythm.

Pray and Play

I was looking back and some older memories on Facebook and there were a few of me right before different trail races. Those times were sabbath times for me where I spent time in solitude with God. Acts of worship and a lot of time of listening and praying. I used to caption those photos with "time to pray, time to play."

I was excited to discover that Eugene Peterson summarizes sabbath activity into these two areas. He identifies this in the reasons for Sabbath given in the Exodus and Deut passages.

The Exodus reason directs us to the contemplation of God, which becomes prayer. The Deuteronomy reason directs us to social leisure (not working), which becomes play. Praying and playing are deeply congruent with each other.

Peterson says,

Playing is doing something enjoyable that one is not obligated to do.

Prayer on the Sabbath provides the chance to "not act while in awareness that God is acting" and contemplate how God is working, even though His work cannot always be seen.

For me I think of praying as talking with God about what you are doing together. Collaborate!

"The great reality we are involved in as people and pastor is God. Most of the people around us don't know that, and couldn't care less. One of the ways God has provided for us to stay aware of and responsive to him as the determining and centering reality of our lives in a world that doesn't care about this is by sabbath-keeping. At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate his, quit talking to each other and listen to him. God knows we need this and has given us a means in sabbath — a day for praying and playing, simply enjoying what he is."-
Peterson

Care and Community

We see in Luke how Jesus carries out this principle on Sabbath. He cared for the community by meeting the need of hunger and healing.

Other side of care is self care. Taking time to rest, reflecting, and refresh. When we care for ourselves and allow God to care for us we are better in community. In caring for ourself we care for our community. (Emotionally, healthy, spirituality).

Sabbath is also a great time or day to include community into it. Family, friends, sabbath buddies.

To apply these things and practice doesn't have to be a full day. Great if you can and I believe God blesses that. But start with 12 hours or 8 hours or get intentional about a rhythm of sabbath moments. A sabbath morning, or evening. A sabbath lunch or hike. The more you become intentional about practicing this the more it becomes a rhythm in life where days have sabbath moments where you apply the sabbath principles.

And if you can't remember all the principles I'll simplify it even more.

Stop, Collaborate, and Listen

Sabbath should be a blessing and not a bourdon. IT is a gift of grace and for us to enjoy God, and life in general. A moment to reflect and celebrate what you have accomplished in work though Him. It reminds us of our identity and freedom you have in Jesus—the freedom from slavery to sin and work, or human expectation. The Sabbath is a rhythm of grace and a sign of the hope that we have in the fullness of God's kingdom to come.