

Spiritual Practices-Healing Busyness-Keeping Sabbath
Genesis 2: 1-3, Exodus 20: 8-11, & Mark 2: 23-28
(September 23, 2018)

Sabbath. What comes to mind when you hear that word? What memories, feelings, thoughts or images? How did you experience Sabbath as a child? Was it a day of contentment and joy or a day of drudgery? If you are of a certain age I think it's fair to say that you probably remember the Sabbath as a day of "shall nots". I remember being reprimanded for being loud or rambunctious behaviour. I remember there was a Sunday voice in our house that we children were expected to maintain. Its this kind of thing that Jesus comes up against in his encounter with the church of his day. The Pharisees, the religious authorities of his time are appalled that Jesus and his friends would pick grain to eat on the Sabbath. If you think your Sabbath upbringing was harsh you've got nothing on Orthodox Judaism. You weren't permitted to tie knots on the Sabbath because then you might be tempted to work your animals. Jesus responds with this line; "the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath."¹ In other words, just like the Sabbaths of many of our upbringings, what was intended to be a day of rest and joy had been turned into a burden, as a result of the overbearing and judgemental attitude of the Pharisees.

When I think of the Sabbath of my childhood I think the word burden would be an apt description. Who needs burdens? As our society has become more and more secular, burdensome religion is something for which we have no time. We've gone completely the other way. We now live in a 24/7 world. But I think what many of us have discovered is that we have simply swapped burdens. Technology allows us to be constantly in touch and available to others, but it also creates the expectation that we will always be available. The creation of false needs by advertising and marketing along with stores that never close and 24/7 internet shopping keeps us locked in a lifestyle of working in order to consume. The more we consume, the more successful we are judged to be. Our lives seem to be lived under the burden of availability and productivity. These burdens and the soul destroying impact they have on our lives are the very thing that the Sabbath was instituted to counter. The book of Exodus says; "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; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns."² The Sabbath was created to free people from the burden that comes from constant work, from lack of rest, the burden that comes from the belief that life all depends on us, on our efforts, our planning, and our constant availability. The truth is it doesn't. The world seduces us with an artificial urgency that requires us to respond without listening to what is most deeply true.³ The world doesn't come to a grinding

¹ Mark 2: 27

² Exodus 20: 8-10

³ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*

halt, we discover that things aren't as urgent as we made them out to be when we simply stop all the working, all the consuming for one day.

Did you notice what the scripture said? The Sabbath applies to animals as well. The Sabbath is also there so that creation can rest. Don't we need to hear that message in our age of environmental degradation? If you're always using creation then creation simply becomes a tool or a means to accomplish something else. You lose your sense of the sacredness of creation. But when you stop, you can admire, you can allow yourself to be awed. In the words of scripture you can sit back, look it over and say, "This is good".

Keeping Sabbath is not easy in our time, it takes commitment and it takes courage to resist the many temptations and demands of our consumerist, workaholic society. Sabbath is no longer a legal requirement of our times so we need to be intentional about it. Because we or our family members might work on Sunday we might need to create Sabbath time outside of Sunday. Sabbath time is about two things; worship and rest. As Fred talked about last week we worship in community, we gather to remember whom and whose we are; we gather to give thanks for all that is, we gather to be reminded that we are not alone in striving to live faithfully. The other element is rest, whatever that might mean for you; a nap, reading a book, having coffee with your spouse or a friend, calling loved ones who live far away, going for a walk or a hike. You'll know what you need. The thing about choosing not to work is that it opens up the door for two other things that so often get neglected in our time; relationships and play. When we choose to refrain from work we have time for people, for Sunday dinners, for long chats on the phone, for hiking together. When we choose to refrain from work we have time for play, activities that we don't have to do but choose to do because they are fun, they bring us joy and delight. You'll know what that is for you. Keeping Sabbath is about listening to our bodies and our souls; it's about honouring the voice of God that speaks in us to say "slow down, I love you for who you are, not what you do".

The grace in all of this is the comfort that comes in acknowledging our limits. When we take Sabbath time we discover that when we stop, God doesn't. Our star, the sun still shines, the earth still rotates, plants and flowers still grow, people are born, and people die. If this makes us feel unimportant that's the point, our importance does not rest on what we do, it rests on remembering whom and whose we are; children of God. When you boil it down that's why Sabbath is an important spiritual practice, in fact its why so many of the spiritual practices are important, they change our identity. When we practice Sabbath and heed the call to cease creating, there is space to remember that we are created. We see ourselves not as the manufacturers of our lives who must strive to get whatever it is we want, but rather we see ourselves as the recipients of gifts. In the church we say we see ourselves as the recipients of grace and that as they say changes everything. I think its what Jesus meant when he said to live in the world but not to be of the world. May God bless us with the wisdom of Sabbath keeping. Amen.

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