

Sept 18, 2016

I'm So Busy: A Sabbath Rhythm
Marysville United Methodist Church
Pastor Jenny Smith

Here's our plan for this morning. If you are a note taker, pull out that insert and jot down things that come to mind. Or soak it all in now and you can always read or watch this message on our website later this week to jog your memory.

I'm going to tell you a story about chairs and saying no. We'll talk about what Sabbath is and what it is not. And the guilt that can rise up when we rest. We'll get practical about Sabbath. What might it look like in this season of your life? We'll wrap up with some meditation time and reminders from God on rest and play.

In Shauna Niequist's new book, "Present Over Perfect," she tells this story. "Years ago, Aaron and I were talking with the pastor of a fast-growing church, and another friend, a more seasoned pastor. The first pastor was telling the story of how the church had exploded, how they couldn't stop the growth, how it was utterly out of their control, an inexplicable, unstoppable phenomenon.

The seasoned pastor pushed him gently: "You've built this, and it's okay to say that. You've intentionally and strategically built a very large church. It's okay to say that." The young pastor kept protesting, preferring the narrative of wild and unexplained growth. "We had nothing to do with it," he insisted. "Well, not nothing," said the older pastor. "**You kept putting up more chairs.**"

It can be hard to grasp the idea that we have some say over the size of our own lives—that we have the agency and authority and freedom to make them smaller or larger, heavier or lighter (Niequest).

The next time it feels like life is moving too fast, remember that we're the ones who put up more chairs. We say yes to this and then to that good thing and then took on that other thing. We set up more chairs. And the good news is that we can take down some chairs.

You are the steward of your own energies. No one else can steward them like you can. Your energy is the most sacred, holy gift you have. Get quiet with God and pray over your calendar and life. Quit things. Say no. Don't apologize for it. If other people get mad, it's usually because they wish they could quit something too. Say yes to the things that give you energy and life.

So this morning, here's our first question. What do you think of when I say the word, Sabbath?

- Invite answers

So what is Sabbath? Is it taking a nap? Doing nothing? Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off, when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we set aside a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true (Muller).

Another definition of Sabbath is a time set aside for **rest and play**.

Why is this hard? We each may struggle with different reasons why. (And by the way, I did hear from some of you who have absolutely no problem stopping your work to rest and play. I'm so thankful that comes naturally to you!) For others who find it difficult, I want to highlight two reasons why today.

First, let's talk about technology. How many screens do you have in your home?

-- We have 16 screens and only two of them are TV's.

There's a reason many of our days feel the same. These screens are with us all the time. Some of us have a healthy relationship with our screens. We use them for certain amounts of time a day. We set them aside when we're with people. We prioritize the person in front of us instead of the digital distraction. Some of us do not. We feel naked if we leave the house without our phones. We check them while driving. We mindlessly grab our phones every time they ding. We check them out of boredom and anything we feel a little uncomfortable. We have come to depend on them in ways that are not necessary and honestly, quite insane.

These devices are addicting. When we get a message, it means we're still in the game and connected. "We matter, we're doing something." Anyone else check their phone and there's no new texts, emails, message...and a small part of us is disappointed. "They forgot me?"

Someone once told me that when they first started practicing a Sabbath rhythm and took away the constant stimulus of their phone and laptop, their body was like, "what are you doing to me?" It took months to adjust to simply taking one day away from technology. It's like a drug. We're addicted. For some of us, this is the hardest part of slowing down. Rethinking our relationship to our technology.

For others of us, we feel guilty if we slow down.

While many of us are terribly weary, we have come to associate tremendous guilt and shame with taking time to rest. Sabbath gives us permission; it commands us to stop (Muller). We feel guilty because our culture screams at us to never stop. So to look at your life and prayerfully respond to God's voice that says, "stop," is a **big deal**. It's not easy. But it's easier if we do this together. Take time and prayerfully look at what's under the guilt. Dismantle it, piece by piece. Surrender to the truth that rest is holy.

Let's get practical.

One of the questions people ask most about Sabbath is when is it supposed to happen? Is it a certain day of the week? Is it a full 24 hours? What if I can't do that right now?

Our Jewish friends celebrate the Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Christians often celebrate the Sabbath on Sundays. It's not so much the specific day, as the way we relate to time during our Sabbath. For instance, my Sabbath is Friday because Sunday is a work day for me. Some of you may find yourself in a season of life where setting aside one day is simply not possible. So you may set aside a Sabbath afternoon or morning or evening. Or a Sabbath 15 minutes on a Tuesday afternoon. All of it is holy.

Regardless of when your Sabbath is, when you set aside that time, you are relating to time differently.

It's entering into a different mode of time. Usually we think about productivity when we think about time. Two hours can get me _____. So when you set aside a Sabbath evening, instead of mentally listing all the things you can get done, the conversation in your head becomes, "how can I rest and play this evening? How will this evening look different than the others?" Create a beautiful meal and enjoy it slowly, go for a bike ride, read a book, take a nap, call a friend, light a candle and think about your week.

When Sabbath feels like a chore, we're doing it wrong. Sabbath is for rest and play.

I used to think Sabbath was a solo activity. How could I recharge from all the people if I was still around people? Then I had kids. And they don't practice a full day of Sabbath away from me. So I'm learning how to celebrate Sabbath with my kids on Fridays because it's Mom day. At first, I thought, "ok, I'm going to teach my children how to rest and play." Then I quickly realized my children are masters at play and had something to teach me.

One day I was talking with Isabella and asked her what her job is in life right now. "To play, Mom." I told her I needed help learning how to do that more -- sometimes I want to work and get things done too much that I forget how to play. I asked her to teach me.

Friends, we used to be kids. And we moved through time differently. We had a rhythm of play and rest as little ones. Then we grew up and changed the rules on time. We tried to get something out of each hour. Kids often are simply present and enjoying what's in front of them. Or screaming at what's in front of them, but they're still present.

Here's one way to think about Sabbath play for adults. **Play is wasting time on purpose.**

Play is not just self care -- something I do now so that I can be more efficient more when I get back to work -- the play itself is holy.

**If I could give you one question to start your intentional Sabbath journey, it is this:
How will this one day look different than the others?**

What makes you come alive? Make a list. Do those things.

Here's part of my list: being by the water, playing with our kids, talking with Aaron, baking, phone calls with my parents and close friends, exploring new places in Washington and taking a break from social media.

These are things that make me come alive. Sometimes, during my week they feel like work, and that is not Sabbath. But when I set aside a day to move through time differently, these things connect and ground me to God and other people in a way that floods my heart with new energy and spirit.

When we spend a day moving more slowly, it reveals the insanity of the other days.

Sabbath takes planning.

Originally, the Sabbath had to be planned for, food gathered a day in advance. It wasn't handed to the Hebrews on a silver platter. This principle remains. I still have to plan for the Sabbath, tying up loose ends and gathering what we'll need. I still have to prepare the family for rest, enforcing healthy boundaries and protecting our calendar. (Hatmaker)

Say that you decide to sit down with your family calendar and you block out a portion of a day or a full day for Sabbath, and say that it's Saturday afternoon. You get to Saturday at lunch and the things you wanted to get done on Saturday morning are still calling your name. What do you do?

Wayne Muller says it this way: "Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report that is due tomorrow. **We stop because it is time to stop.**"

Sabbath is the day and time when our work is complete, even if it's not. - Rob Bell

So I hope you go home today and pull out your calendar and take a very close look at the day's you've planned. Are they full of things that give you life? Are there chairs you need to fold up and put away?

More than that, set aside a time in your week for Sabbath. Move through time differently and see how it feels.

Let me remind you that **our world needs us to figure this out. Our kids need us to figure this out so they can practice it as they grow up. Our neighbors need to see us figuring this out. I need you to figure this out so you can be teaching and reminding me.**

We're going to wrap up this morning by practicing a little guided meditation.

SCRIPTURE & MEDITATION TIME

Psalm 23:1-3: The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive.

Here we have another stunning principle undergirding Sabbath time: God does not want us to be exhausted. God wants us to be happy (Muller).

Luke 5:15-16: News of him spread even more and huge crowds gathered to listen and to be healed from their illnesses. But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places for prayer.

Jesus did not wait until everyone had been properly cared for, until all who sought him were healed. He did not ask permission to go, nor did he leave anyone behind "on call," or even let his disciples know where he was going. Jesus obeyed a deeper rhythm (Muller).

Genesis 2:2-3: On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation.

I invite you to take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Friends, may our conversations about Sabbath continue. We close this morning with an email auto-reply from a pastor in North Carolina: "Because God has gifted us with Sabbath, I'm out practicing the grace of uselessness today, the inefficiency of not doing anything productive. I pray you are as well." Amen.