

Sunday, September 25, 2016 - Remember the Sabbath

Genesis 2:1-4

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Noticing leaves on drive to church - 53 red and 16 yellow - I drove really slow that morning because we were really wrapped up in what we were trying to see -- and I **loved** it! I resented people around me trying to go faster. I didn't want them to hurry me up. I thought about it later and was reminded that when we pay attention to the moment in front of us, life really does slow us down. There was nothing to get out of the moment. Simply noticing was a form of Sabbath on a Tuesday morning.

Today we're going to explore a few other angles on Sabbath rhythms. We'll explore the holiness of Sabbath time, how other people's pace affects ours and what a church can learn together from the Sabbath.

As we good Americans build our lives, we receive the message loud and clear that things/objects/possessions matter. We know in our heart that people and moments are more important, but our behaviors often don't match. So we continue to believe that peace and joy and true rest is found somewhere outside of ourselves. That it's something we can collect or create or buy. But God has something different for us.

One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word *qadosh*, holy; a word which more than any other is representative of the mystery and majesty of the divine. Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar? It's very significant that the word *qadosh* is used for the first time in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that **it is applied to time**: "And God blessed the seventh *day* and made it *holy* (Gen 2:3)." 7 There is no reference in the story of creation to any object being given the quality of holiness. (Muller)

**The Sabbath time is holy. It was the first thing God called holy.**

So unfortunately, that work project with a stressful deadline? Not holy. The PTA meeting? Not holy. The Seahawks game? Hmm...not holy. Very fun, but not holy.

Holy is reserved for sacred **time** with God. Not for objects or things.

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Rabbi Abraham Heschel reminds us, "Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned *to the holiness of time.*"

This past weekend, I took our 4 year old daughter to Bellingham for a girls' weekend. Just the two of us. We stayed at a hotel with a swimming pool, stayed up late eating ice cream, playing games and watching Barney! It was a wonderful 24 hours away, just us. And as we pulled into the driveway, I felt the same feeling I get after every vacation or short trip away from our normal routine. The air is different when you're in vacation mode, isn't it? We move through it differently.

It's the same with Sabbath. When we move into Sabbath time, it's a different way of relating to time. We press pause on our need to produce and create and achieve. We stop listening to the voices that say we're not \_\_\_\_\_ enough. *Connected, organized, encouraging, wise, beautiful, producing, smart, funny...* **Sabbath is the moment each week where our souls remember who we really are. A child of God, already loved, already enough.**

A couple months ago, I was driving on I-5 in the rain. Which is one of my least favorite activities. I noticed how other people's pace affected my own. I wanted to go slower because the road conditions called for it and I was nervous driving in the rain. The shiny road wet with water looks way too much like Alaska ice to me. So it feels like I'll slide off the road at every curve.

But I wanted to keep up with everyone around me. It was hard to stay in the furthest lane to the right and go 45 in a 60 mph zone. On my own, it was really tough to move at a slower and safer pace. Then I was thankful as I came up to another car going fairly slow because I could fall into line behind them and no one could really get mad at me. **Other people's pace affects our pace.**

Which also means, when we band together with other people who commit to moving more slowly through life, it makes it easier for us all to slow down. Almost as if we all chose together to set our cruise control to a slower speed. Then we don't have a choice, because everyone is moving much slower!

Two thoughts on how this might affect us as a church.

I would love for us to have an accountability culture around Sabbath. For it to be normal and expected that someone in our small group or a friend would ask us, "How's your Sabbath rhythm going? Are you setting up too many chairs lately? When did you slow down, set aside the list and rest and play this week?" The more we ask that question and listen to the honest answers, the more we can strengthen our Sabbath muscle.

Sabbath takes great practice and it really is a muscle we can strengthen. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish rabbi, says, "Labor is a craft, but perfect rest is an art."

Second, the pace of other churches and organizations can affect our pace. Many of you have likely noticed if you've been a part of a faith community over the years, that churches often create a lot of busyness. We want to make a difference in the world so we create more groups, activities, outreach ministries, mission trips, worship gatherings, Bible studies, etc. We see another church doing something and we want to do it too. We do it with good intentions for helping the kingdom of God become a reality in our world.

But...we get so busy...we set up a lot of chairs. And then we need to manage, rearrange, pay for, and find people to lead all those chairs. The church's pace can move so quickly that we don't slow down very well to listen to God's quiet wisdom and direction.

I dream of a church culture that values Sabbath rest and play. **Where we're not afraid to work hard, sacrifice and create something worth sharing. AND we're not afraid to believe the Gospel is really true** -- that when we make time for rest, play and deep listening to the voice of God, the abundance of what is left over is enough. I dream of a culture where we don't fill our lives with so many activities that serve everyone else, that we ignore our own relationship with God.

I dream of a church that doesn't have organizational meetings just because we've always done it that way. When we meet, it's because we have meaningful ministry to coordinate. And instead of 20% of the people doing 80% of the work, we see everyone doing the one or two things that give them life and great energy. That's the kingdom of God. Being the body of Christ together.

Because here's the thing, friends. **I refuse to sacrifice my soul, my health and my family on the altar of ministry.** And I will continue to arrange our life together as a church so that it doesn't happen to any of you either.

There is something sinful and unhealthy about churches that claim to follow Jesus yet find themselves so busy, frantic, distracted and motivated by human success and growth that they don't intimately know the very Christ who wants to lead them. Jesus tells us his yoke is easy to bear and his burden is light. The Message version shares these beautiful words:

**Matthew 11:28-30** "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."

Is that the kind of faith community you want to be a part of? Because it's the one I want be a part of.

And here's some good news for us as a church today. Our Administrative Council, our elected leaders in the church, are currently exploring a different model of leadership that's becoming a best practice around our conference. It's called the single board governance model. We just had a workshop with Steve Ross, who wrote the book on the model and has helped over 100 churches make the transition. You're invited to a town hall meeting to hear about the model and share your feedback. More info in the bulletin.

The model combines some of our administrative teams so they can vision for where our church is going, it creates new systems of accountability and gives priority to our Ministry Teams that are doing boots on the ground life changing work in our community. It streamlines our work together.

Friends, we talk a lot about arranging ourselves so God can spend us. If we continue to sense great energy around this model, then it's a significant way to say we're very serious about valuing the rhythm of work and rest and play. And something really beautiful happens when your values match your behaviors.

So there you go. That's all I got for now on Sabbath. I'm learning something new about it all the time. So don't worry, we'll return to it again. But for now, I leave you with this truth from our friend, Rabbi Abraham. When we practice the Sabbath, we are practicing heaven. "Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath ... one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come." It was on the seventh day that God gave the world a soul, and "[ the world's] survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day."

Amen.