

We continue our series during Lent on “Keeping the Sabbath Wholly” W-H-O-L-L-Y; and the spelling is intentional.

As intentional as the word Sabbath is, how we remember the Sabbath when we Cease, Rest, Embrace, and Feast.

Last week we looked at Ceasing. Yes, stopping work is not easy. It tests us: will the world and us fall apart if we stop making things happen for a while?

And today we look at what happens when we cease: We rest.

As someone told me, “We are so proud of our Protestant work ethic, but we need to develop a Protestant rest ethic.”

Look back at the creation story in Genesis 2: *“And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.”*

A.J. Carr, one of our 9th Grade confirmands, in his Lenten Devotional, said: “If I could describe this scripture in one word it would be *Necessary*... If it is essential for God to rest, it is certainly essential for humans.”

As strange as it sounds, we do NOTHING, but that nothing is really something that God makes, in the words of A.J.: NECESSARY

I recently read an article about contemporary homes and neighborhoods. One architect was urging the return of porches on all houses.

He said, “All we have now are spaces for coming and going. We need a place to stop and sit with each other and a place from which to invite our neighbors into our homes, into our lives.”

I think of Rachel Held Evans’ book “Searching for Sunday” or “Sabbath in the Suburbs” by MaryAnn McKibben-Dana (both of which have been studied in different Sunday School classes here) ...people looking for a place to sit in the midst of, as A.J. said, “in the midst of our stress-filled lives.”

Sabbath is that front porch from which God invites you and me to rest with God in keeping Sabbath, when we cease on Sabbath, so we can become more deeply immersed in the peace of God and enjoy our true sanity.

One Old Testament scholar notes that the Hebrew word for God’s resting used in the fourth commandment literally means “to catch one’s breath.”

In other words, this commandment is designed to provide two things for us: refreshment and restoration, that we are restored and refreshed when the day is over.

And be sure, this is also for those who don’t have control over their days. Not everyone gets to choose when to take a vacation to the beach or off to the lake for a weekend...nothing in creation should separate us from God’s commandment to rest and be restored and refreshed.

Let’s be honest, though, our world has invaded the Sabbath and they will continue to take it away from us in every way that is possible.

If you are waiting for someone to say, “Here is time for you. No one will ever schedule anything on top of this or expect anything from you that you could not do another time” ...

You and I know that is not going to happen.

But let me be clear, this is not a sermon on time management. Sabbath rest is a matter of how we manage what Paul describes as our “spiritual worship.”

The question is “What is your approach to Sabbath rest? How do you rest for your Sabbath: physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually?”

And the answer is as individualized as you are an individual, for who you are, how you are. It can happen any day, any time.

But the result of Sabbath resting is the same for all of us: The opportunity to know the presence and peace of God, no matter our circumstances.

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For all of us, Sabbath rest requires a decision. If we think we are going to wait until everything is done to stop and rest, we will never do it.

And I’m not going to just point a finger at the world out there; it’s us, too, you and me.

Years ago, when biofeedback was just coming on the scene, someone wrote that she discovered her ordinary ways of *trying* couldn’t produce relaxation.

Trying is, for the most part, what we know how to do; trying is the energy of control.

But the mystery of Sabbath rest is the opposite of control. Every encounter with the reality of God in prayer, in scripture, in worship, in sacrament, in community, in creation, is a call to let go of our idols of productivity and know the truth.

Abraham Heschel, in his wonderful book *The Sabbath*, talks about Sabbath rest in terms of the Hebrew word *menuha*, which means ‘rest’.

He says the word means “much more than withdrawal from labor and exertion, more than freedom from toil, strain or activity of any kind.”

He puts it in terms of a state of mind, a sense of being where there is no conflict or fighting, no fear or distrust.

If you will, to be in a time where we are living life W-H-O-L-L-Y...wholly. And when we do that, life is lived H-O-L-Y, holy. Wholly holy.

This might help, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...He leads me beside still waters*”, literally *the waters of menuhot*.

God leads us to Sabbath, to cease and rest in our lives for our souls to be restored...Necessary! So don’t look at Sabbath rest as another rule that we all have to keep or else God is going to be mad at us.

Think of Sabbath as one of God’s great, wonderful gifts to us: leading us to those places and times of ‘still waters’, refreshment and restoration.

Then, let’s use what God created on the seventh day, *menuha*, this Sabbath rest, in a way that says to God, “Thank you for this gift of time.”

Use the time to do things that enrich you and give you something that captures your imagination and feeds your soul, that is relaxing, letting go of trying to be God.

Find something that signifies you are in a different mode of being than those other days, that different state of mind that comes with Sabbath rest, presenting yourself to God, your spiritual worship.

John Claypool described it as that moment when you experience the incredible all-rightness of how it ought to be.

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I like the way Joan Pinson, in her Lenten Devotional yesterday, reminds us that what that means at age 20 is different for us at age 70. As she said, “It is not our worldly persona that matters, but how we worship God with our heart.”

This is the essence of the Hebrew word *shalom*, which we translate ‘peace’, which means, most importantly, “peace with God.”

If we are not at peace with God, no other kind of peace is possible.

The peace that comes with Sabbath rest is not what's left when you take everything else away. That's plain old boredom.

As the little girl said when she wouldn't stay down for her nap, "I'm tired of resting!"

The peace of Sabbath rest is in letting yourself catch up to God, in letting God catch up to you where you are.

The late Beverly Sills, the great opera singer, not only had a beautiful voice, but she also had a beautiful understanding of peace.

She called it her "stillness".

She learned that when she was under stress (and what could have been more stressful than getting ready to sing three or four hours of opera) that when she felt this stress, she learned to stop and quiet herself wherever she was and let the peace of God catch up to her.

Sabbath rest and the connection with God and with others and with ourselves that comes with it are part of what, in God's goodness, has been given to us so that we can enjoy the best that God has intended for us.

Sabbath rest is a gift that God has given so that everything in all creation can have the opportunity to be refreshed, restored.

Sabbath rest is a time for us to focus on God, to feel connected to God so that we may discern, embrace, live "what is the will of God, good and acceptable and perfect."

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

When you cease and listen, I believe you will hear from the front porch of Sabbath, God saying to you and me, "Come on up, rest a while, I want to enjoy your company."

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TO GOD BE THE GLORY.