

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Remember the Sabbath"

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Matthew 11:28-30)

Opening Hymn: Blest be the God of Israel #752

Closing Hymn: Lord of all power #626 (1,3,4)

Children's Hymn: When Israel was in Egypt's land #708

Choruses: 10,000 Reasons, Jesus all for Jesus, Behold the Lamb

Rev. Steve Filyk

July 7, 2019

Is Sunday a day you look forward to?

Or is it a day that you dread?

It can be a day where the routine is different, life-giving,

A day when regular chores and activities are set aside

And room is created for activities that nurture spirit and community:

Reflection, relaxation, and fellowship.

It can also be a day that is simply used to take pressure

Off the rest of the week.

A day to catch up on chores and to complete neglected tasks:

Grab the week's groceries, mow the front lawn

read through accumulated emails, and pay outstanding bills.

Don't forget to throw in Sunday worship!

PAUSE

So is Sunday a day you look forward to?

And how do you feel when the day is over?

Are you rested and ready for another week?

If you're answer is no, then you should pay close attention  
To the sermons this month.

Over the next three Sundays we will be looking at  
The provision of the Sabbath,  
And what keeping it could mean for our living.

PAUSE

Many of us are aware that observing the Sabbath is  
one of the big Ten Commandments,  
those commandments written by the finger of God.

It is the fourth commandment  
Squeezed in between those ones about loving God  
And loving each other,  
And expressing a little of each.

Unlike those other commandments which are terse in expression,  
This commandment tells us how to apply it the law,  
And why we should bother anyhow.

How do we observe the Sabbath?

We are told that one day a week we shouldn't be working.  
More than that, we should not be causing other to work:  
"neither you, nor your son or daughter,  
nor your male or female servant,  
nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals,  
nor any foreigner residing in your towns,

so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.”

Think of this the next time you ask your children/grandchildren  
If they’ve practised their piano  
or finished their homework Sunday evening.

But more than just doing nothing  
the commandment offers us something in replacement.  
We are told to ‘remember’.

It is right there in the commandment: “remember”.

“We are enjoined this day to remember, recall, recollect, and re-create.  
We are not simply to remember that we ought to keep the Sabbath,  
but we are to remember who God is—active and loving,  
resourceful beyond **our** actions and resources.”<sup>i</sup>

That’s a little bit about how the Sabbath is to be applied.  
As for the reason behind Sabbath-keeping,  
Two different rationale are provided.

When the commandments are first given at Mt. Sinai  
Shortly after Israel’s escape from Egypt,  
the keeping of the Sabbath is  
grounded in God’s own rest after creation.

You’ll find this in the book of Exodus.

When the commandments are repeated by Moses 40 years later,  
As Israel is preparing to enter the promised land,  
A keeping of the Sabbath is grounded in God’s rescue  
And provision of freedom.

That is what we read today:

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt  
and that the Lord your God brought you out of there  
with a mighty hand...”<sup>ii</sup>

Today we encountered that fourth commandment.

More than that we are given its ‘how’ and ‘why’.

Given all this help, it is interesting to realise

That of all the commandments

It’s the one that we are the quickest to dismiss.

In her book *Receiving the Day* the Church historian, Dorothy Bass,

Reflects on a **Saturday** evening dinner

She spent with other professors:

“All whined about the grading they had to do the **next** day.

Suddenly it struck her that Christians would never tell each other,

"I'm planning to commit adultery"

or "I think I'll steal something."

So why do we feel fine about dismissing our Creator's commandment  
to keep the Sabbath holy?”<sup>iii</sup>

Why don’t we keep the Sabbath holy?

I think there are certainly a handful of reasons.

We aren’t always sure how Sabbath applies to us  
in a post-resurrection world.

We now celebrate it on the eight day instead of the seventh,  
A day that anticipates not just what God has done  
but what God is doing.

We are also impacted our own experiences  
of legalistic Sabbath-keeping.

Some may look back romantically  
to childhoods with cold porridge for breakfast,  
No sports or no card games,  
and church twice on Sundays,

But not everyone experienced this as life-giving.

Maybe most of all we influenced by our 24/7 working culture,  
A culture that is both anxious and ambitious.

We are afraid to stop, even for a day,  
lest we lose those opportunities  
That our ongoing work provides.

This last reason is probably the most persuasive.  
And the results are often tragic.

Tragic because the very people God has designed for freedom  
in the end become slaves,  
Or becoming task-masters.

We become the Pharaoh's that God challenged,  
Or the people that baked bricks under the sin.

Just think about it.

“There had been no Sabbath in Egypt,  
no work stoppage;

no work stoppage for Pharaoh who worked day and night  
to stay atop the pyramid.

There had been no work stoppage for the slaves,  
because they had to gather straw during their time off;  
no work stoppage for anyone in the Egyptian system,  
because frantic productivity drove the entire system.<sup>iv</sup>

God had freed the people of Israel from this slavery.  
And God would have us live in this freedom.  
He gave us the first labor laws  
to prevent us from restoring slavery.

God gave us the Sabbath:  
a day to stop and ponder the world around us,  
A day to recognise the unearned blessings  
that have been given to us,  
A day realise that the world won't go to hell  
without us.

God gave us the Sabbath:  
Time to temper our anxieties and ambitions with the realisation  
That just as God provided for the people of Israel  
When they were languishing in Egypt,  
God will provide for us.

So are you living in this freedom?

The reality is you can be a slave working back to back shifts in the factory,  
Or sitting in the office of your 5,000 ft<sup>2</sup> home.

A person who is free is the one who can step back from this work  
And realise that they have been created for something more.  
But to be able to really do this, you have to practise it.  
Regularly.

PAUSE

Is Sunday a day you look forward to?

And how do you feel when the day is over?  
Rested or completely frayed?

Maybe it is time to reconsider this commandment  
God gave for our freedom.  
How might your Sundays start becoming a little different?  
And how might this impact the rest of your week?

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<sup>i</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon *The Truth About God* 58, 59

<sup>ii</sup> Deuteronomy 5:15

<sup>iii</sup> Joan Huyser-Honig "God's Countercultural Invitation to Sabbath Rest"

<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/god-s-countercultural-invitation-to-sabbath-rest>

<sup>iv</sup> Walter Brueggemann *Sabbath as Resistance* 27