

Sermon Transcript
“Resolving to Rest – Thoughts on the Sabbath”
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I didn't know about you, but there are times these days when

I just want to

crawl under a rock, escape the stresses

and strife of the morning news

and just find some peace for me.

That involves taking walks in the woods, usually

with my dog, connecting with the larger world

of nature around me.

It also involves connecting with others

and spending time with folks I care about.

And it involves encountering the sacred

and being reminded of those values

and principles that are important in this life.

Now, wouldn't it be amazing if we could just set aside one

day a week to just do that?

Not only would, not only that,

but wouldn't it be amazing if our traditions

actually encourage such a practice

and inspire us to find regular moments for rest

amidst the hustle and bustle of our lives?

Wouldn't that be great?

Oh, wait, oh wait.

There is such a practice and such a tradition.

It's, it's been here all along.

It's called the Sabbath.

Admittedly, the Sabbath is a peculiar notion.

At first glance, it can hide a depth

of meaning and implication.

We probably all know it's literal meaning

to rest, to cease from doing.

It comes from the Hebrew verb Shabbat, which means to rest.

It is an ideal that is woven into the fabric

of the earliest traditions of Judaism

and later Christianity being cited in both the creation

story and at the beginning of Genesis

and the giving of the 10 Commandments in

Exodus and Deuteronomy.

In the second chapter of Genesis at the creation story,

we learned that after God had created the heavens

and the earth in six days, on the seventh day,

God finished the work he had done and he rested.

He rested. So God blessed the seventh day and held it

because on on it,

God rested from all the work he had been

doing in the creation.

It's worth noting that there are several firsts in this

passage in Genesis.

It's the first time that Sabbath is introduced.

It's also the first time that something is called holy.

Up until then in the creation

story, everything is called good.

God created the land. God created the oceans. It was good.

God created night and day. It was good.

But here, here in the last

and the seventh day when God rested, it was called holy.

And the Hebrew word that's used here is called *kosh*,

which means literally it's often translated holy.

So the first time the word holy is used in the Bible is de

is to describe the seventh day of rest

in the creation story.

The a prominent place

that the Sabbath is mentioned is in the 10 Commandments.

Observing the Sabbath day

and keeping it holy is the fourth commandment.

We heard it read this morning.

It's interestingly enough,

it's also the longest commandment.

It takes the most amount of words to describe

or to give this commandment now as commandments go.

I mean it's, it's the longest,

but it's also unusual for several reasons.

It's the only commandment that deals explicitly with ritual

or observance, unlike the others.

It does not deal with religious belief or idolatry

or devotion or our behavior to other people.

Rather, this fourth commandment holds up a different though

universal aspect of our lives.

And that would be time. Time.

It's clear that the ancient Jews focused on time more than

other groups and made some notable choices in their religious beliefs as a result.

Perhaps it's because of their nomadic history.

Instead of calling a place holy, instead of calling a sacred shrine where they could go holy.

Like most religions of the ancient world, the first thing the ancient Jews called holy was a day before there was Israel, before there was a Jewish nation, before there was the central temple, there was the Sabbath. There was this commandment to set aside one day a week for rest, which was at the time a revolutionary idea.

One that for much of the last 505 centuries has been more or less taken for granted.

A last that was then, this is now this realization that the Sabbath day was the first thing to be called holy was noted by rabbis and other commentators down through the centuries.

Indeed, they went further and asserted that the rest on the seventh day was not just the cessation of work or activity it, it could not just be defined negatively as the absence of labor.

There was a positive dimension to this day of rest as well.

In his book, the Sabbath, rabbi Abraham Heshel notes that God did more than just rest.

On this seventh day

after all, the passage from the second chapter
of Genesis reads, on the seventh day,
God finished the work he had done.
It appears that God had himself worked on the Sabbath he
created and what did he create?

God set a day apart and thereby created renewal
and tranquility or the opportunity for it.

Heschel uses the Hebrew term *mana*
to describe this aspect of Sabbath.

The word can be translated as stillness, peace or harmony.
Heschel declares that it is the state wherein humanity lies
still wherein the wicked cease from troubling
and the weary find some rest.

It is a state in which there is no strife,
there is no fighting, there is no fear,
there is no distrust.

The essence of the good life is *Manoa*.

In fact, in the 23rd Psalm, we know we don't know the word,
but we know how it, the English term the word is used.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

The word still in English
is the more ancient word *mana* in the Hebrew.

So the meaning of Sabbath is rest,
but it is a reflectful rest.

It is a rest without worldly division or pursuits.

It is a making.

It is making a period of time wholly by setting it apart
and using it to reflect upon what is essential in this life.

To pause, to pause amidst the hustle
and bustle, the stresses and strains and step back
and behold the mystery to sense the eternal

Rabbi Hessel writes, the meaning of the Sabbath is
to celebrate time rather than space or stuff.

Six days a week, we live under the tyranny
of things of space.

On the Sabbath we try to become attuned
to holiness and time.

It is a day in which we are called to share in
what is eternal in time to turn from the results of creation
to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation
to the creation of the world.

I love that line to turn from the results of creation
to the mystery of creation.

We forget that in the ancient world of Judaism
and Christianity, for most of human history,
a day off was truly a rare thing.

It hasn't very been very long
that people have had five day work weeks
and two day weekends.

Indeed, many people around the world still do not.

In these days. Society including ours is changing.

More and more people are working more and more hours.

Mobile communications and laptops

and the internet have freed people up
and made us more productive, but they have also ensnared us
and encouraged us to work more and more hours
and have blur the traditional lines
between home and work life.

It's funny, I remember years ago in the nineties
when email first came out
and I remember some of the, the arguments,
the editorials about praising the technological marvel
of email and how it was going to save us all
so much time.

How'd that work out for us?

So that maybe now that our society has moved away from
Sabbath, the Sabbath will all of a sudden
become more appealing to more of us within the society.
Maybe now that many of us seem to not have enough time
during the week to get everything done, I'll count myself in
that category as the pressures of work continue to increase
the prospects of taking a day off for rest
and reflection become more attractive
for spending more time with our families, our partners,
our friends, our souls.

Maybe now that we have moved away from the Sabbath ideal,
we can realize the truth of Rabbi Irving Greenberg's claim
that the Sabbath has kept the Jews
far more than the Jews have kept the Sabbath.

Now, please don't get me wrong here.

I am not arguing or suggesting that we return

to a full observance of the Sabbath.

Not at all. After all, the Jewish ideal of Sabbath for what it's worth, comes with many rules, as does the Christian ideal.

Historically Orthodox Jews not only can't do work, they have 38 different types of work or labor they cannot do On the Sabbath day.

It's amazing to listen to them list, list them off.

The Puritan who founded our congregations some 327 years ago, had some very strong notions of what the Sabbath meant to them.

In fact, their preparation for Sunday services began with prayers of contrition and redemption the night before.

And I thought my Saturday nights were difficult.

But the real interesting question is not what the Sabbath meant to our ancestors, but what, what it can mean to us.

How could we observe a sabbath of sorts that is meaningful?

Yes, coming to church is part of it or some sort of sacred ritual, otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here right now.

But how else do you do it?

Where do you go to find tranquility, manna, and connection?

Where and when can you go?

Where, when and where can you go

to encounter some transcendence, some aspect

of the sacred in your life?

Well, I would submit to you that you might try
to find smaller moments for Sabbath.

If you can't find space for a whole day,
perhaps you can find, I don't know, a morning,
a Sunday morning or another morning
and find several hours interspersed through the week.
What might that look like? It could be a variety of things.

I know many of you have things and activities
and pursuits that bring you meaning, that recharge you.

It could be cooking a meal that you love.

It could be sitting for a few minutes each night
as your children finish their homework.

It could be taking a nap.

It could be practicing meditation or centering prayer.

It could be taking a walk or a run.

One of my personal favorites.

It could be volunteering for a church program
or helping out at a local shelter like some
of our members are doing this week.

It could be attending a protest
or advocating for an issue that you believe is important,
especially with others in community.

It could be designating one night a week
as a family dinner with no tv, no cell phones, no computers.

It could be whatever helps you take the attention off
of yourself and lets you even for a few minutes, feel
as though you are connected

to something greater than yourself,
that you are more than just the hours
that you log in at work, that you are in some small way
contributing to the redemption of the world.

In the end, having some sort
of Sabbath observance means leaving time not to do,
but to just be
and experiencing what arises out of that.

It means leaving time to think, to feel, to meditate,
to pray, to reconnect to the mystery
that is at the heart of this life.

And some might call the holy.

It's interesting. Zen Buddhists have a saying
that I often will repeat.

Uh, during our meditation programs on Thursday,
it goes muddy water set still

In a way, the Sabbath is the Jewish
and Christian articulation of that idea.

Take time each week to let the dust settle from your labors
so that you can see the world a little bit more clearly.

Take time each week to rest
and behold the mystery that is the creation.

Take time to think of yourself
and those around you as something more than associates in
business, coworkers in the same company,
fellow members of the club.

Give yourself a few moments to do

absolutely nothing if need be.

Let the clouded and often turbulent water of your life.

Settle for a few moments and be clear.

Remember, there is a reason we call ourselves human beings
and not human doings.

Sometimes in this world of 50 hour plus work weeks
and team oriented results driven work groups,
it is easy to forget.

It is so easy to forget that
the Sabbath then is the invitation
to step back from the world that we inhabit
during our regular week.

The world of making money
and concentrating on our material realities.

It is the invitation to put down our outlook calendars
and our phones and our tablets if only for a few minutes
and make some time for rest.

Make some time for reflection, for tranquility.

Make some time for our children
and our family and our friends.

Make some time for recreation
and to change the emphasis of the word.

Make some time for recreation
as we start a new year in the Jewish calendar this Tuesday.

I can think of no better suggestion.

So for the ancients
and for us, there's nothing more valuable,
nothing more precious than our time.

While we can conquer the world,
while we can acquire more money
and material things,
while we can earn a sterling reputation,
we cannot gain an extra minute of time,
we can only use it and we can only relish it.

The Jews and Christians down through the ages have used it
by setting aside one day a week for rest, reflection.

By virtue of doing so, they established a weekly rhythm
for their own redemption, their own renewal, A rhythm
that each generation must find a new for itself.

My hope, my hope this day
and during these turbulent times is
that we each will find our own ways to search out
and observe the Sabbath day, to plug in,
to find some renewal and to keep that holy.

Amen.