

## “Rest: It’s Holy”

June 10, 2018

*Through the Eyes of a Child series*

A mom tells the story of her daughter who was a bit grumpy because she was tired. The rule in their house was the same that the mom had grown up with: it didn’t matter how late you stayed up last night, you *would* be pleasant in the morning. The daughter couldn’t do it anymore. She stomped up the stairs to her bedroom and said, “I can’t be pleasant anymore!”

That mom was my mom, and that daughter was me. The jury’s out on how old I was when this occurred. My dad says 7 or 8; my mom says 10. This rule about being pleasant despite lack of sleep was well-established in my house, and it’s a good one. It’s helped me remember more than once that sometimes we’re just tired and need some rest.

We’re exploring that call from Jesus to nurture child-like faith (not childish faith). And rest is a part of that. The video of little kids falling asleep is cute and funny, but we also see the comfort and trust that’s there, especially in the last baby where a hand is stroking the baby’s head.

Rest is a holy thing; it’s time that truly helps us to trust in God. When we’re truly resting - whether sleeping or taking a break from everyday busyness, we’re not thinking about all we have to do. (Although, I’ll confess that it’s difficult not to have a mental list rolling even as I try to rest well!) We’re trusting that the world can and will function without us for a time.

Even in the midst of many demands, rest is something that Jesus modeled for us. Just before the miracle of feeding of the thousands, Jesus invites his disciples to rest. **SHOW SLIDE** - Mark 6:31 (TNIV) *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”* Jesus shows the need for the rhythm of work and rest - not just work, work, work - that we sometimes claim.

There are many references in the Gospels to Jesus’ practice of going away from the crowds to be alone and pray. How can we even think that we can go along without stopping to rest and renew ourselves? Jesus, Savior of the world, made Sabbath time, even in the midst of his life and ministry, and we cannot afford to do any less.

He withdrew from the demands of many people, not to ignore them or to make them wait, but to care for himself so that he might be able to help them. Many times, he goes off by himself to pray after he has healed and served, even as others seek him.

And I know what someone is thinking - this Sabbath idea is impossible! I have too much to do. There's never enough time. Kids are different than adults. We know they need rest! But it's impossible! I have way too much on my plate to take a break. People depend on me!

But we all need rest, and it's been that way from the beginning. Yes, Jesus models that sacred rhythm of work and rest, but so does God our Creator. Genesis is clear that God rested after creating! The word "Sabbath" comes from Hebrew—it means "to stop."

Even more, God "hallowed" that day—made it holy, set it apart. Scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann says, "That divine rest on the seventh day of creation has made clear (a) that YHWH is not a workaholic, (b) that YHWH is not anxious about the full functioning of creation, and (c) that the well-being of creation does not depend on endless work."

As we've been studying Exodus on Tuesday mornings, I've been reminded again that God wanted to form the Hebrew people into a holy nation. The Ten Commandments were a part of that formation, and Sabbath is at the heart of it. Keep in mind that the Hebrews have just come out of years of enslavement in Egypt. They were forced to work, and I don't imagine that there was a lot of rest for them.

So Sabbath was a way that God was forming the Hebrew people into a holy nation. It was a way not only to be refreshed, but to be transformed. These Ten Commandments seal the covenant that God makes with Israel.

Notice how these ten words from God are laid out. The first three deal with our relationship with God (worship God alone, don't make idols, don't misuse God's name), and the last six focus on our relationships with others—with our neighbors (honor your parents, don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, and don't covet). It's interesting that the Sabbath commandment falls right in-between. Walter Brueggemann has a caution for us: "Worship that does not lead to neighborly compassion and justice cannot be faithful worship of YHWH. The offer is a phony Sabbath!" So that connection between worship - love of God - and mission - love of neighbor - is real!

Perhaps even so many years ago, Sabbath was a counter-cultural thing. We know that it is today. Just think about the last time you intentionally took Sabbath time - time apart from work to rest and renew your spirit. Brueggemann's book is called Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now, and he lifts up how keeping Sabbath really is a resistance to our "I want it all, and I want it now" culture.

He says, "In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods."

It's a challenge, isn't it? To consider how honoring the Sabbath stands against what we prize in terms of doing and getting - production and consumption. But Sabbath is about being and remembering who we are.

You may have heard me share this before, but it's worth noting that in the Chinese language, the word "busy" is made up of two characters that mean "heart" and "killing." Literally, we're hurting ourselves when we prize busyness as a way of life. When we honor Sabbath, when we claim that much-needed rhythm of work and rest, we do better at loving God and loving neighbor.

Jesus challenged the strict adherence to the Sabbath, but still held up its importance. In the Gospel of Mark, the story is told that the disciples are picking grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees question Jesus, and he reminds them that David ate the consecrated bread that was reserved for the priests and also gave it to those who were with him. That would've violated the Law, too. And then Jesus says, **SHOW SLIDE** - Mark 2: 27-28 (MSG) *"The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no lackey to the Sabbath. He's in charge!"* Jesus lifts up the importance of Sabbath as a way that people are formed and transformed.

Jesus honors Sabbath, but he's quick to react against those who try to legalize the Sabbath rather than honor it. Sabbath is part of God's plan to nurture and care for us. Rest is about honoring God who made us and cares for us. It's allowing ourselves time to get rid of distraction and trusting God to provide for us. Someone said, "Resting on the Sabbath isn't so much about what we do or don't do, but rather about taking time to remember who we are and to whom we belong." Sabbath is really about honoring our identity as children of God.

Perhaps we need to focus on God's word to us: "Remember the Sabbath." That's the key word for Israel and for us. Even using the word "remember" implies that

God knows our humanness in forgetting how important it is to take time away from the rush of life to be rejuvenated. God knows what we need to hear. And God keeps saying it. There are references to in Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. God continues to remind Israel that Sabbath is essential to their identity and life from God.

Kids know the sacred rhythm of work and rest, even though they fight it sometimes. Kids know that rest is a deep need, but just like us, sometimes they're apt to say, "I'm not tired!" until they're absolutely exhausted. And yet, many times, kids show us the necessity of holy rest.

This week, Jeanne Funnell shared with me a special book that the first graders at Ross Park made for her as an end-of-the-year gift. They were asked to write "Words of Wisdom" about activities to do this summer and then draw a picture. There were a lot of fun ideas - go to the movies, do a lemonade stand, go to the beach. But I was especially intrigued by the last page in the book. **SHOW SLIDE:** Karsen wrote, "You can sit and watch the stars. It's pretty. It's quiet. It's relaxing." Please note the awesome spelling!

Wow! That sounds exactly like Sabbath time to me! A holy time of appreciating beauty, of embracing silence, of relaxing in the awe and wonder of our world. Friends, Karsen has it right. That's holy time! Remember Karsen's words. Remember the Sabbath - our need for holy rest.

May we keep the Sabbath so that we can love God and love one another well.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**Offer breath prayer - "More of you, O God; less of me"**