



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for February 27, 2022
“Fruitfulness: Rest”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Leviticus 25:1-7

A Matter of Grace

We pick up our series on fruitfulness with the disciples on the margins of a field gleaning what’s left for those passing by. You can find that account beginning at Mark 2:23.

The rub for the disciples was that they were doing this on the Sabbath. In the eyes of some, they were harvesting, which was considered work. With the Pharisees looking on, they found themselves in hot water, which meant that Jesus was in hot water. Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach about Sabbath.

He said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* (Mark 2:27)

Jesus was quick to assert that Sabbath was God-given and an opportunity not only to rest but draw ourselves closer to God. In that regard, Sabbath is very much a matter of grace, a reflection of God’s love.

We’ll be talking about Sabbath today and the notion of rest that is very much a part of Sabbath.

In keeping with the images from the field we have used over the past six weeks, we will be looking today at a wonderful scripture from Leviticus that talks about what’s called, The Sabbath Year. It was a year where even the fields were given rest. Let’s hear this then from Leviticus 25:1-7.

Leviticus 25:1-7

The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land, I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

Sabbath as Rhythm

Sabbath is very much a rhythm, a rhythm that was established at creation. The Lord worked six days and on the seventh he rested. This idea of rest permeated the entirety of the Hebrew faith.

Of course, we know that the notion of Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” (Exodus 20:8-10)

Our passage for today is an extension of that. Even the fields where the labor was done were given a chance to rest.

“For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord.” (Leviticus 25:3-4)

While living in Lexington, I passed by the School of Agriculture at the University of Kentucky pretty much every day on my way to UK Hospital. I even had a couple of professors who taught in that school. A student in the School of Agriculture is taught how to farm. It is a complicated science that melds not only how to efficiently grow crops, but to apply the business acumen to make a living at it.

I am sure the students there are taught a lot about rotating crops and the fertilizers that help them to grow. The Hebrews centuries ago didn't rotate their crops or use fertilizer as we know it, they left their fields fallow on a set schedule. Six years they planted crops, and the seventh they let the field rest.

The point of the Sabbath Year we read about in Leviticus 25 was give the land an opportunity to rest. There was a certain wisdom to that. If the fields weren't given a rest, they would eventually end up not bearing much fruit.

A Matter of Faith and Trust

At a deeply spiritual level, the Sabbath Year was an opportunity to exercise one's faith and trust in God. Think about this. There would be no crop from the time the crop was harvested in the sixth year to the time when it was harvested two years hence. That's a long time.

While the law stated that what came up voluntarily could be harvested, that still left everyone trusting in the provision of God. As we have said often, that's never a bad place to be.

With that thought in mind, allow me to assert that Sabbath is a matter of faith and trust for us.

When we practice Sabbath, we set aside time to rest and re-connect with God. And when we do, we essentially trust that God will honor us with his presence and will provide just what's needed. We also trust that when we get back to it everything will be okay, if for no other reason, because God will be there as well.

Sabbath and The Lord's Day

For the early Hebrews, the Sabbath was a regular rhythm built into flow of life. It was a reminder that rest was needed and was extended even to the fields and vineyards that provided sustenance.

The idea of rest is not just an Old Testament thing, but also a New Testament thing.

Sabbath rest has always been seen as good for the soul. It not only gives us the opportunity to draw closer to God but gives us rest from the workaday world. When it comes to the importance of rest, talk with those who have been on the front lines of the Pandemic and have worked day after day, week after week without a break. There is a point where you get exhausted.

In the Old Testament, there is more a notion of earning your rest. We come by that honestly. The Lord worked six days and on the seventh he rested from his labor.

In the New Testament, the Lord's Day, which followed the Sabbath, was set aside to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The Lord's Day put the early church to thinking about how Jesus had transformed their lives and how the resurrected Lord was now informing every area of their lives, including their work. In a word, the Lord's Day prepared early Christians for the week ahead.

We can glean two things from each emphasis:

- First, Sabbath gives us rest from our labors. Who of us doesn't come to the end of a work week feeling as though we have earned a little rest?
- Second, Sabbath prepares us for what is ahead. Who of us having rested isn't better prepared for the week ahead?

Sabbath is a rhythm that not only offers rest, but rejuvenation. If we fail at both over time we will simply run out of gas, and not be much good to anyone, including God.

What Then Is Sabbath Going to Look Like?

What then is Sabbath going to look like for you? Hopefully, it will be a day set apart. Sadly, it is just another day for far too many.

I can remember when stores, for the most part, were closed on Sundays. Now it seems like it is only Chick fil A. I also remember when Blue Laws were repealed. Things also began to change regarding Sabbath. Other things began to creep in, and before too long Sunday was just another day.

Again, what's Sabbath going to look like for you? Hopefully, you will find yourself rested, renewed, and strengthened for what's ahead. Hopefully, your focus will be put right where it needs to be, and because of that you will be able to move into the days ahead knowing that God is with you.

Recreation vs. Re-creation

When I think about Sabbath, I don't think so much about recreation, but re-creation.

For me, re-creation means:

- Worship.
- Reading scripture, a devotional book, or some uplifting book or article.
- Spending time alone or time with others.
- Pulling away from the same old same old.

When it comes to being re-created, I look for those things that will enrich my relationship with God and renew my relationship with others. Sometimes when it comes to being re-created, I can do the most mundane things and feel connected to God. What are those things for you?

Sabbath as a Matter of Pace

For me, when it comes to Sabbath, Sunday is a big part of that.

So are other times during the week, particularly early mornings, and late evenings.

Borrowing from my running, I try to strike a pace and Sabbath is a big part of that. My pace is not the same as yours and yours is not the same as mine. As with my running, I can feel it when my pace gets out of whack. I can go for a while like that but not for very long.

What about your pace? Does it include Sabbath?

Sabbath as a Matter of Intention

You would expect me to say this, but I am going to say it anyway. *“Keep the Sabbath Day holy.”* It’s the Lord’s command.

God created us for Sabbath. He knows we need Sabbath in every way.

There’s talk these days of a four-day work week. I figure if we go to a four-day work week over time we will just fill it with the same stuff we fill our time with now.

Sabbath, true Sabbath. is a matter of intention. It is a matter of focus. It is a matter of setting ourselves aside, just like a field during a Sabbath Year. It is a matter of giving ourselves permission that it is okay to be renewed.

God would have it no other way.

A Big Part of Being Fruitful

So, let’s agree then that rest is a big part of being fruitful. We are simply not much good to others, ourselves, and, most importantly, to God without rest.