

***The Joy of Sabbath***  
**Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6**  
**Sermon by Mag Richer Smith**  
**July 8, 2018**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

<sup>12</sup>Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>14</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Mark 2:23-28

<sup>23</sup>One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” <sup>25</sup>And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? <sup>26</sup>He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; <sup>28</sup>so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Mark 3:1-6

<sup>3</sup>Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup>They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup>And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” <sup>4</sup>Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. <sup>5</sup>He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup>The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

**SABBATH KEEPING**

***Plan your escape to the Emerald Isle today!***

That message came through my email the other day. And it’s tantalizing, because **much of life** has become a rhythm **between BUSYNESS and ESCAPE!**

How different that mindset is from a rhythm of ***Ministry and Sabbath...*** and it makes **all the difference** in how we view **the**

**enterprise of Being Human**, the **TIME** we have been given to live on this planet and the **RELATIONSHIPS** for which we have been created.

In 1989, after 10 years of pastoral ministry, Bob and I took our first sabbatical with 3 little children at **an overwhelmingly busy season** of our lives.

In many ways my **inner well was running dry**, and I was ready to throw in the towel to pastoral ministry. **“GIVE ME A BREAK!”** my spirit was shouting!

We took that sabbatical at our seminary (at AMBS).

And shortly after our arrival in Elkhart, our friend James Waltner called and asked me to **preach at College Church**.

Woe, what **a flattering invitation!**

At that time College Church was full of my old professors, and **my ego** wanted this opportunity!

But I also wanted to **attend to the Spirit**, so I asked my friend for a week **to pray and think** about his invitation and every time I prayed, I heard the same word:

**“Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”**

What that meant~ I did NOT know.

I mean what could be more **HOLY** than **Proclaiming the Word of God?**

On the day I was **supposed to respond** to that invitation, I still did not have clarity about what a **HOLY SABBATH to the LORD** would look like, but when I arrived at my class on Spiritual Disciplines that morning, to my **utter astonishment** our teacher Marcus Smucker said he felt led to alter the prescribed class agenda and instead talk about Sabbath.

That class not only **brought clarity** to my decision about preaching at College Church, but also **changed my life!!**

Marcus said,

**“Holy”** literally means to MAKE WHOLE and TO HEAL, and **“Sabbath:** means **work stoppage** to REMEMBER our identity in God.

**“And,” (he said) “what we do with GOD’s time and our observation of Sabbath is perhaps the most crucial issue of our day.. for our growth, spiritual survival, & energy to DO justice and save life..”**

Marcus quoted Eugene Peterson who said:

*“The world is in a conspiracy to steal our Sabbath. It’s a pickpocket kind of theft, and we aren’t aware of it until after its occurrence.*

*But, a few years of Sabbath-breaking and we are:*

**passive consumers** of expensive trash,  
and **anxious hurriers** after pleasures.

*We lose our God and our dignity at the same time.*

*That is why I want you to keep the Sabbath, guard the day, protect leisure for playing and praying.”*

Before this class, I **hadn’t thought much** about Sabbath keeping.

It looked like some **“THOU SHALT NOTS”**:

So on Sundays: we don’t mow lawn,  
don’t go shopping,  
don’t go to work, etc.

With all the important issues of the world,

**giving energy** to those **little prohibitions** seemed clearly **peripheral**.  
(Besides with 3 little children, **who has time** for Sabbath!?)

But that day I was challenged anew to reflect on  
**Sabbath as SALVATION.**

Creation begins in dark chaos with God at WORK..hovering with a steady pace, fervently making a ***world that is fruitful, generative and full of blessing***. AND IT IS VERY GOOD!

But then there is this **7<sup>th</sup> day when GOD RESTS!**

And because God is not a workaholic, there is **no anxiety** about a day away. God knows the world's well-being does not depend on endless work. God models recovering God's own self. AND WE are made in the **image** of this CREATIVE & RESTING GOD!

For Jews, **Sabbath became essential** during **the EXILE** when they were living in **an Empire** that demanded their **FULL allegiance**.  
Sabbath-Keeping was **how they ANCHORED** themselves in the **Relationship** for which they had been created.

**Today another empire seeks to claim us as its own.**

Walter Brueggemann says:

“In the anxiety & pressures of living in belly of an Empire, the **celebration of Sabbath** is a radical **act of resistance**, a **refusal** to let ourselves be defined by **production**, a time to **remember our baptismal vows...** “

to LET go of **striving** and LET the **love of God** *sing to us.*””

\* \* \* \* \*

I had just graduated from college and moved to **a community 500 miles from my hometown** where I did not know anyone. I was teaching four grades, all subjects and had never had training for elementary teaching.

So I was in **over my head**. Midway through that first semester, I had a great yearning for the **relaxed state of being known and loved...** in short I was **homesick**.

When I described my feelings to my mother, she said,

**“Come home this weekend!”**

**“Yeah, right. There’s NO TIME to make a 500 mile trip” ...**

**“Oh,”** my mom said, **“You’re just 2 hours down the road by plane.**

**Get a ticket. The money will be worth it.”**

So I flew from Allentown, PA to Toledo, Ohio on Friday night and had a Saturday at home~ **basking in the warmth of HOME. eating the most loved foods** from Mom’s kitchen, **and resting from the stress** of new and demanding work.

At home I wasn’t under the gun to **perform or produce**.

I was valued simply because I was my mother’s child.

I went back to my new residence on Sunday having been RE-CREATED: Teaching was no longer about **ME** and **MY job performance** and my need to succeed, but about **HOW TO LOVE** and **equip** the 17 kids I interacted with each day.

Well, what I have learned in the meantime is that **HOME is not 500 miles away**. The womb of the BELOVED is right here, wanting & waiting **to enfold us** and **remind us** that we are **unconditionally RECEIVED**, wanting to offer us the **JOY of resting and abiding in the love that SAVES**. Sabbath is an invitation (in this **HEAVY-YOKED** society) to

LIGHTEN UP... and **LET** the SOURCE of LOVE RESTORE us to be more HOLY... “more whole” “more healed.” “more healthy.”

Jesus ***grieved*** how Sabbath-Keeping was **trapped** in Pharisaic captivity, with its rigid rules, heavy obligations, & dismal duty to the LAW ...The day (that was intended to be a FREEING GIFT) was **stifling** in its bondage.

The day for ***praying and playing,***  
***resting and remembering,***  
 and **saving our lives**  
 had become *deathly in its constraints...*

Very early in Jesus ministry, we have this **scene of He and his friends walking through a grainfield**, and the disciples were plucking the grain, ***enjoying free snacks***, like manna, provided by the LORD!  
 But the Pharisees quickly ***point a finger of accusation***, (because picking grain on the Sabbath is unlawful)...And Jesus REMINDS them  
***“Look, the Sabbath was made for humankind..  
 Not humankind for the Sabbath.”***

Sabbath-Keeping was never intended to be a **binding burden...**  
 But rather a time to remember we **are no longer slaves of the task-masters** who demand is “MORE!”  
 You do NOT have to ***DO more, know more.***  
 or have your kids in ***more sports and activities,***  
 You do not have to ***look younger or more beautiful.***  
 Because Sabbath breaks Pharoah’s pattern of Seduction & DOMINATION!

Remember you are **No longer slaves** to frantic productivity!  
 Push the PAUSE button!

Enjoy a day each week to remember you are free...

a day for **strolling in nature, riding bikes,**

**picking wildflowers** along the millrace,

**stopping for coffee,**

**listening to music,**

**playing with children...**

and learning from the "ROCK STARS OF JOY" how to play with and delightful abandon and holy wonder!

Ask what **makes your heart sing!**

Rekindle **hearty laughter. Picnic** in the park,

and **relish in the warmth of HOME**

(in the ONE who loves us as we are~ without conditions.)

Sabbath calls us to **remember our liberation** and sing:

**"Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are Free at last!"**

Without this day **HOW will we hear that love song** that brings *JOY* to our *withered & shriveled spirits &*

to this *withered & shriveled world?*

How will we remember that **God's intention** is for "*everyone to live under their vine and fig tree at peace and unafraid?*"

Still, the Pharisees are **adamant about the RULES ...**

And that is when the next story appears and **the man with the withered hand** shows up in the synagogue for worship.

Jesus is being watched intently. He's in the **glare of public media.**

Shadowy figures are keeping **careful surveillance** and **poised to pounce...**

& Should JESUS cross the line, they will **get him.**

Jesus takes their dare, saying to that man with an obvious need, *Come forward....”*”

creating *disruption* in the middle of worship!

***(Jesus could have taken this man aside in private and healed him outside the public scrutiny, but NO!)***

And (according to Andre Tracme) THIS is the TURNING POINT in Jesus’ public ministry...a carefully staged public theater...that will lead to execution.

Jesus calls the man forward and then looks at ***those who have kept Sabbath in captivity*** and asks:

***“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good/ or to do harm, to save life/ or to kill?”***

And there is a **dead silence**...poisonous in its ***violent lack*** of love.

The **Pharisees** are ***EXPOSED*** here ***for caring more about a LAW*** than a brother.

(THE PHARISEES here are like those who CARE about the misdemeanors of immigrants than the long-term health of children & families).

***“Oh come on,”*** Jesus is saying, ***“What are laws for?”***

Jesus looks at these **hard-hearted, stringent clenchers** of the LAW and is **angry** that anyone would place **theological or political ideals** above **human needs**...and **then use scripture** to defend it.



Laws always need to be scrutinized. After Jeff Session's **scriptural defense of separating families because "Govts. are ordained by God, and we should obey them,"**

a facebook friend posted this quote from a Jewish woman:

***"The Holocaust was legal.***

***Slavery was legal.***

***Segregation was legal.***

***The brave woman who cared for and hid my 6 year old aunt in an attic in Budapest was a criminal. She broke the law by sheltering Jews and saving lives."***

Legality is not a guide for morality!

(And one wonders ***what kind of Sabbath Keeping that woman in Budapest might have practiced*** in order for her to RISK her own life in order to SAVE MORE) and let LOVE be LORD.

Jesus asks the Pharisees,

***"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? to save life or to kill?"***

And there is a **deathly silence** that **angers JESUS,**

So he says to the man with the withered hand,

***"Stretch out your hand."***

**The man does so, and his hand is restored.**

IMMEDIATELY there is a **rush for the exit.** Powers do NOT want to be challenged! The **media has a story** to print. And the Pharisees and the Herodians conspire together **how to DESTROY** this guy, how to *do harm* and how to *kill!*

What's just happened? Jesus has broken the LAW in favor of human compassion... DEFINING anew what is important about SABBATH.

Sabbath is a day to remember that LOVE is LORD of heaven and earth.

Sabbath is the day in which God says,  
**BE still...Be healed...Be RESTORED... be Free...**

**Pray, Play, Dance, Sing, Laugh,**

**Simplify and Soak in the LOVE** so you can then embody it to your neighbors.

Sabbath is a day of consciously **LETTING Go** of all our **inadequacies**, & letting our Mother-God feed us with her **most delicious HOPE**.

It is a day of **declaring to the powers** that they do not **own or direct** our lives

a day of **trying less and trusting more**,

and **remembering** what **LIFE is meant to be**.

How badly one day a week we need **this kind** of **letting go!**

**How urgent** it is that we know **how to get HOME every day**.

How much Jesus longs to **SAVE US, HEAL us,**

and **transform our rhythm** from

**driven achievement and numbing private escape**

to **Ministry and Sabbath**.

It makes all the difference for

how we view **WHO we are and What our CALLING** here is.

Jesus LIBERATES Sabbath from it from BURDENSOME

**SHOULD'S & Don'ts**.

Though John Rempel would say there are still some **"Don'ts"** for good Sabbath keeping:

- 1 Don't work...
- 2 Don't shop...
3. Don't worry
4. Fast from screens.
5. And **Worship God...** & Do what awakens you to **God's presence & beauty.** In the midst of the **rushing river, rest on the ROCK!**

Sabbath keeping is much more than self care. It is consciously **entering into God's care**...for us and ALL THE EARTH!... and **RESTING** in the One whose **LOVE re-creates.**

Recovering this sacred Rhythm is perhaps

***"the most crucial issue of our time,"***

It is how we ***become LOVE***

and how we will **experience the JOY of our SALVATION!**