

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

“Lord’s Day Rest”

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Ordinary Time

Over the past three weeks we’ve been going through a mini-series on the Lord’s Day. We’ve talked about the Lord’s Day as a gift. We’ve talked about Lord’s Day Worship. And today, we talk about what it means to rest on the Lord’s Day.

So far this morning we have heard God’s word read from Genesis 1:26-2:3, Hebrews 4:1-10, and Luke 13:10-17. Now, I want to add one more reading to that list.

Listen now to God’s word from Deuteronomy 5:12-15, which is printed for you on the back of your order of worship.

12 “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall 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.

Thus far the reading of God’s word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in Heaven loves you.

Prayer...

Speaking in large scale terms about the cultural context in which we live today, I don't think we have any idea really of how to rest well.

Part of this is because many of us just have a kind of general addiction to work.

Many of us have jobs that demand a lot of us, and because of the ubiquity of the internet and the smartphone and the laptop, we can now work always and everywhere - which means that work follows us home, our boss or clients can get in touch with us at any hour of the day, we're always going to be tempted to just "check something" or just "send a quick email." And of course, the last 18 months have only further blurred the lines between work and everything else as many of us have gotten used to working from our homes in ways we perhaps never did before.

And even if it's not "paid work" that is constantly following you around, you probably have a never ending to-do list that includes friends you should call, emails you need to reply to, financial tasks you need to address, projects around the house that need to be done, planning that needs to be done, etc. etc.

And so many of us just live in this frantic buzz of activity such that even when we're not doing the things on our to-do list we're thinking about the things on our to-do list and feeling guilty for not doing them because the devices in our pockets we carry around with us mean we could be doing them if we just had the energy and the end result of that is that many of us don't ever really rest and if we do "rest" we just kind of collapse on the couch and try and find something to entertain us that will require as little mental activity as possible.

And so we binge TV shows for hours. Like literally hours and hours. One episode ends and then we calculate how long the next one will take to watch. And then, ok, just one more. Or play video games.

Or watch the news. Or scroll through our social media feed. Or mindlessly put things in our Amazon wishlist that we might want to buy one day.

And to be clear, none of this is really “resting.” It’s just sort of unhooking our brain from our bodies and our emotions and our anxieties for a bit in order to survive until the next day.

Many of us, I’m concerned, don’t really rest. We just sort of try to make a little truce with the frantic activity of our crazy lives for an hour or two so we can wake up and do it all again the next day.

And this way of living, friends, is not healthy. You know it. I know it. It’s just not.

One of the real tensions of life in this modern world is that, even in the midst of more wealth and more security and more luxury and more entertainment than any other human beings in history have ever imagined, much less actually experienced, there is also this nagging sense that something is deeply wrong, that we’re not really happy or satisfied, that our world isn’t really set up in a way for us to flourish.

Well, I have a proposal, friends.

I want to propose to you that despite the insanity of our modern culture, it is actually possible to live a life where you have substantial responsibilities and difficult challenges and even real suffering and still, in the midst of all of that, to also be deeply content and at peace.

But I would propose that the only way we can have that contentment and peace is by living a life that characterized, above all things, by communion with God. Communion with God. Ultimately, that is the way of life and peace, even in this world.

And I would propose further that the communion with God that will sustain us in the midst of all this craziness isn't some kind of awesome transcendent spiritual experience that we have discover somewhere, but communion with God is actually found in the kind of simple practices that Christians have been doing together for thousands of years: *Reading the Scriptures. Praying - both alone and with other Christians. Receiving the Lord's Supper.*

And in addition to these things, I would suggest that one of the things that will give us a shot at real contentment and peace is learning again what it means to keep the Sabbath day holy. What it means to set apart the Lord's Day not only as a day of worship, but also a day of rest. What it means to engage in the gracious discipline of saying no to all the normal things we say yes to on a particular day of the week so that we can say yes, in a deeper way, on that day, to communion with God.

One of the things we need to think about when we talk about the Sabbath is how it is connected to God's intention to give us rest.

Depending on your perspective, keeping Sabbath may sound onerous or scary or invasive, but really, actually, it's the reflective of the goodness and love of God - our heavenly Father loves us so much he desires to give us rest, and to set up boundaries around our work so that we can actually give ourselves to the pleasure of resting.

You can see this clearly in the commandment given in Deuteronomy 5. Remember that this commandment was originally given to a people who very recently been slaves. They worked seven days a week for Pharaoh, and he was a harsh taskmaster.

And God loved his people so much that he literally went to war with Pharaoh so that they could rest. That's how important it was to him.

Listen again to the Fourth Commandment from Deuteronomy:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God...You shall 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.

Do you see the connection here? Central to a faithful Sabbath-keeping is the reality that Israel must remember that she was once a slave in Egypt, and her God has delivered her from that slavery in order that she might know what it is to rest.

Friends, although we are now in the New Covenant, our identity as God's people is still the same. We are those whom God has graciously delivered from our slavery to sin and death by his mighty hand in order to give us rest. And yes, that rest that he intends to give us will be fully realized in the eschaton.

But every Lord's Day, every Sabbath day, we are invited to enter into the eschaton and receive the gift of God by faith. Every Lord's Day is meant to be a small experience of the fullness of heaven. That's what it is. And, by God's grace, that is what the Lord's Day can be.

This starts, of course, with the rest that God give us each Lord's Day morning in our worship. Remember, we don't primarily come here on Sunday mornings to give worship to God - rather, we come here because God intends to give something to us. And what he intends to give us is rest.

And so in our worship, God calls us into his presence. He assures us that our sins are forgiven. He lifts our faces to himself and instructs us with his Word. And then he sets a feast for us, feeding us at his table.

And finally, God sends out to experience the remainder of each glorious Sabbath day with his blessing — literally his name, resting on our heads.

And if we are to keep Sabbath faithfully, then we ought to embrace that rest that God has gone through so much trouble to give us for the remainder of the day.

What I want you to see, beloved, is that each Sabbath day is an opportunity for you to rest, really rest, in a way that is different from whatever forms of rest you can snatch the other six days of the week.

Now, I'm not going to give you a bunch of rules today about what you can and can't do on the Sabbath day.

But I do think that one thing that God's word clearly teaches is that keeping Sabbath faithfully means that the Sabbath day should be different than other days. It should be set apart. It should be, in the deepest sense of the word, Holy.

To be clear, I don't think resting on the Lord's Day just means sort of collapsing on the couch like you might do on Thursday night after a long day. I think it means carving out intentional time to do things you might not do otherwise.

Part of this is entering into God's own rest, as our reading from Hebrews 4 enjoins us to do.

And to do that, we must remember God's rest on the seventh day of creation. Genesis 2 tells us that after he made the world in six days, God looked at all that he had made, and he said that "it was very good." And then, on the seventh day, God rested.

Now, it's important to see here that God didn't rest because he was tired. Because he had earned a day off.

No, it seems rather that God's rest on the seventh day flows out of the "very good" that he speaks over creation at the end of the sixth day. It appears to me, in other words, that God rests on the seventh day to enjoy what he has made in this world.

And I think that reality gives us a really strong paradigm for our rest each Lord's Day.

We rest each Lord's Day not in order to recharge our batteries so we can go out and work hard starting on Monday, but rather we rest each Lord's Day so that we can actually take some intentional time to enjoy and give thanks for all the good things that God has given us in our lives.

Things like salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. Things like the certain hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Things like the presence of other human beings in our lives - especially our family, and our brothers and sisters in Jesus. Things like our daily bread. Things like this remarkable created world that we get to live in and explore with the bodies God has given us.

What I'm trying to say is that every Lord's Day we are actually invited to look at our lives, look at the world, and then join in with the "very good" that God speaks - to embrace the kind of gratitude and joy that seems to characterize God's own life and his relationship to his creation and to his people - even in the midst of all the sin and suffering that exists, God still delights in his creation. And that delight is a central feature of his Sabbath rest.

What I'm trying to say is that I think there should be a kind of celebratory and gratuitous nature to our Sabbath practices.

I'm not saying we should be preparing and eating fancy four course dinners every Sunday lunch. I'm not saying that at all.

Actually, I think something simple, like bread and soup is just fine, and maybe even more fitting for the day.

But maybe, on the Sabbath day, we should eat our simple meal, our bread and soup, on the nicest china we own - as a tangible sign that this day is different from other days. As a tangible sign of our delight in our daily bread and the gift it is from God.

And maybe, if possible, we shouldn't just eat our Sabbath meals with the people we usually eat them with.

Maybe we should invite over friends or even strangers who might become new friends to share with us in the "very good" that God speaks over our lives.

I think there is actually a deep connection between playfulness and Sabbath-keeping.

To rest on the Sabbath means to do things not because they're "productive" or good for us or accomplish something important, but just because of the pleasure we get from doing them.

Things like playing music with a violin or a piano or a guitar. Things like playing a board game for a couple of hours or going on a walk and looking at trees, or listening to a symphony or reading a novel or just having a long conversation where we get to know someone better than we did before.

I don't know what that thing is for you. But what I want you to see, Beloved, is that this is what the Sabbath is for.

The Lord's Day is God's gift for you, a day given to you to be free from your toil and your productiveness and actually enjoy the creation that God has given you - a creation that includes not only the sun and trees but also other human beings and even your own very self.

And what I want you to see is this kind of rest is the kind of rest you actually need - a kind of rest that makes you more human, more holy, more like Jesus.

And to be clear, the rest that we are invited to enter into each Lord's Day isn't an exercise in self-indulgence. That's not it at all. Actually, a big part of the rest that we enter into is the practice of giving rest to others.

If you look again at the passage from Deuteronomy 5, you'll notice that the commandment to rest is actually primarily addressed to those who lead households. And the command isn't only that the leader of the household would embrace rest on the Sabbath day, but actually that he would give rest to everyone else who is in his household and under the influence of his authority.

Which means that faithfully following the fourth commandment each Lord's Day means that we are to use whatever authority, whatever influence we have to give rest to those who need that gift.

This, of course, is why Jesus heals people on the Sabbath day again and again, just as we heard about in our Gospel reading this morning.

It's crucial to notice in these passage that Jesus isn't finding loopholes in the Sabbath law when he heals the sick and makes the lame walk and straightens the bent spines of the crippled.

No, when he does these things, Jesus is actually keeping the deepest part of God's sabbath law and showing us what the Sabbath is for, which is giving rest to those who need it!

And this is why Sabbath-keeping is actually fundamental to loving our neighbors well. Because on the Sabbath, on the Lord's Day, we not only rest ourselves, we also invite others into the rest that God has given us.

Last Sunday, one of our church members told me after worship that he was going to visit a sick friend that afternoon to read the Scriptures and pray with him. And beloved, that is exactly what the Sabbath is for!

Each Lord's Day we cease from our normal labors so that we can do things we wouldn't usually have time to do - like visit the lonely.

Like have a family over for a meal. Like help fix someone's car. Like bring food to someone who is hungry.

This is something I've wrestled with in own life. For a period of time when I first became a pastor, I called Monday my "sabbath" because that's when I didn't do any of my regular pastoral work.

But over time, I've grown in my understanding of the Sabbath day, and now I just call Monday my day off. It's my Saturday, basically, because I spend most Saturdays getting ready for the Lord's Day.

Each Lord's Day, I'm keeping sabbath right along with all of you, because I am giving rest to those who need it - assuring you of the forgiveness of your sins, sharing with you Christ's life-giving word, laboring as Christ's servant as I welcome you to his table.

And, in all these things, what I am trying to do is to invite you, Beloved, into Sabbath-keeping yourselves - so that you will receive rest from God in the morning and enjoy rest and give rest to others in the afternoon and evening and by so doing, remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

As we close this morning, I just want to say this.

Over these past three sermons, what I have been trying to do is not only to argue for the importance of the Fourth Commandment in our lives today - although I *do* believe that the Fourth Commandment is an essential part of God's law, and something we all, as Christians, are called to observe.

What I have also been trying to do, beloved, is to expand your imagination about how good this day really is. To help you dream a bit, to help you imagine what a life that is centered around Sabbath-keeping might be like.

Because I really am deeply convinced that embracing the gift of the Lord's Day, choosing to say no to other things so that you can say yes to Lord's Worship & Rest is one of the most deeply important decisions you'll make in your life, and your communion and life with God will be utterly marked by whether or not you trust him enough to follow the strange and holy wisdom of setting apart this day from all others, whether you receive the gracious gift that he has for you that is found in remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy.

As my final word in this little mini-series, I want to conclude with the words of the Lord himself as he spoke through the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 58, words that I believe are addressed to us as well as his people:

*"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.