

# Christ Presbyterian Church

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Reflections: Rest

Deuteronomy 5:12

Tell me, what are some of the words you have heard to describe the Sabbath? The Sabbath means what? What is the image? (*congregation calls out answers*) Sabbath means sabbath, okay. What else? Church. Worship. Rest. Holy. Quiet. Family. No work. Leisure. Listening. Football. I know when to shut it down....

We want to talk about some of those feelings today. This is a good day to talk about it, in part because I feel good, which is not always the case. Often I feel tired. I am not alone. I live in a nation that runs frenetically. Literally, classically, it has a symptom called sleep deprivation, but today I feel different. I feel powerful. I feel like Charlton Heston on top of the mountain. Remember Charlton Heston? Exodus 20. The Ten Commandments. Exodus 20, by the way, is on page 111, if you want to look at it. Page 111 is the story where Charlton Heston, I mean Moses, comes down from the mountain and tells the people the words God spoke to him and to us.

<sup>2</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

And then in verse 7,

<sup>7</sup> "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. <sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So we are commanded to stop. We are commanded to rest. We are commanded to sabbath because God made us that way.

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

And we, like God, are made to rest on the seventh day. We damage the creation by nonstop motion. Did you know that the Ten Commandments are actually written down twice in the Bible? I think it wasn't until I was in my late twenties or thirties that I knew that the Ten Commandments

are not only found in Exodus 20, but they are also found in Deuteronomy 5. They are almost identical until you get to the third commandment: *no other Gods before me, no graven images, don't take the Name of the Lord in vain*. Then in Deuteronomy 5, we'll put it up on the screen, it says,

<sup>12</sup> "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has 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.

Sounds exactly the same but then look at verse 15. This is the reason you are to keep the Sabbath.

<sup>15</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

So Exodus 20 is to remind us that God alone has made us. He made us in His image and, as God rested, we are to rest. Here in Deuteronomy, God adds that God alone not only made us, but God alone saves us, and we need to stop and remember and rest. Resting is a commandment, a commandment that I believe I disobey perhaps more frequently than any of the other nine.

I believe we are created to work, and I believe we are created to rest. So the next two or three weeks as many of you get one more chance for a last bit of vacation before school starts, before Labor Day when work ratchets up, as you go off for that last little bit of rest, will it work? Will you come back refreshed or will you just be ticked that you have to jump back in and are still tired? May I just make one parenthetical exclusion from this? If you have a child under three, relax. This is the hiatus in your life where there seems to be a need for sabbath more than ever, but it has to take different forms for you.

I discovered a lot about rest on my sabbatical. We are talking about things we have learned, and I feel like I learned a lot about rest. Brad Jackson said, "Dude, you've been practicing this sermon for four months. It ought to be good," and he is right. It was a phenomenal time. I read dozens and dozens of books, most of them fiction, which was great. But I also read Metaxas' book on Bonhoeffer, Marin's book on the gay and lesbian community, *Love Is an Orientation*, and Paul-Gordon Chandler's book, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*. Do I know how to have a good time or what, eh? The best book I read was by Mark Buchanan. Mark Buchanan is a Canadian, and he wrote a book called *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*. We have it in Pathway. He says we must learn or relearn to rest or we will never get our lives to look anything like the abundance of life God has for us. We have to learn to rest; but first, he says, we have to learn how to work, to learn to work as a child of God.

Many of you are great workers but many of us hate work. Others of us worship our work, whether that is our jobs or our children. Which kind of worker are you? I think you only learn what kind of worker you are as you learn to rest. One of the quotes from Buchanan's book that grabbed me was this. He says, "The opposite of a slave is not a free person. The opposite of a slave is a worshipper. The person who is most free is not someone who wins \$230 million at the lottery." I wouldn't mind that, but that is not the opposite of slavery. The opposite of slavery is the person who turns the work of their hands into a sacrament, into an offering, because then

when they work, it doesn't matter if she is a student or he is retired or you are somewhere in between working like crazy. When our work is done well, it makes Christ known as Jesus was known when He worked, when He washed the feet of His disciples, when He broke the bread on the road and gave it for others. The work of our hands is meant to become the worship of our hearts. God says when we work like that, He will bless it.

Do you know why so many men die soon around retirement, right before or right after retirement? It is because they have learned neither how to rest nor how to work. They don't have a constructive view of their work. They either hated their work or they worshipped it, being busy, because being busy made them feel important. They put their faith in a false god, the god of work, and in this congregation, that is not limited to men. Some of you who have sacrificed incredibly to raise children wonder why your lives are empty when the children are gone.

Here is a radical idea. I would like to offer you a spiritual practice that we will practice together in the middle of the sermon. The next time you are tempted to complain about work, praise God that you have a job. The next time you open your mouth to gossip about the people that you work with or smear the people you work for, stop and turn the other direction. Pray for those people. Thank God for your competitors. Find the good in them. That would be a radically different way of looking at work. The next time you want to quit, think of worship. The next time you are so sick of retirement that you want to puke, think of Psalm 90. Psalm 90 says,

<sup>17</sup>...establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

So what I'd like you to do right now is, just take your hands and look at them. Can you do that? Just pull your hands out and look at your hands. Imagine them filled with something that is work-oriented whether you are a student or retired, a homemaker or you will go back to work soon. Look at your hands and now close your eyes. Specifically, think of someone that you work with or that you work for. Pray for them (*pause*). Now think of something that your work has provided you, clothing, food, table, car, vacations. Thank God for what your work has provided because even if it is not much, it is much more than those have who lacked work. Now with our eyes closed, let us thank God for what is supposed to happen six days of our week (*pause*). Amen.

Amen means *so be it*. I agree. Let's do it. We are built to work six days a week. We are also built to rest. Sometimes you see that as just a natural, biological thing. You cannot go day after day after day after day without sleep, but you can go day after day after day without stopping from work. It is an interruption of a rhythm and because it is less visible, we think it is less important and that, frankly, just as we misunderstand work, is how we misunderstand rest. I think we have turned rest into a growth industry. If we work hard, we rest hard. We relax hard. But does it work? Author Neil Postman wrote a book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. I don't know if you've read that. The thesis of the book, frankly, was contrasting George Orwell's *1984*. The government controlled everybody's lives by watching them all the time, making them do things. He said, "That's terrible," and he contrasted that with Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*, where the government controlled not by oppressing but by ruining society with artificial pleasure, robbing them of their ability to strive forward, taking away the challenges that rob people of real life. Which one are we today?

Buchanan again struck me with this quote. He says, "One of the largest obstacles to real sabbath is leisure." Whenever he said *leisure*, I tend to agree, leisure is part of the Sabbath, but

he says leisure is the Sabbath without the sacred. It is just vacationing which means vacating, taking out, taking ourselves out of the equation, vacating without the sacred. That is often why we return from vacations or recreation, more exhausted or drained or even bored than before. This is a good place to discuss the idea of shopping as recreation, shopping as sabbath. Can anything good really refresh our souls that comes out of a mall or a shopping bag? Don't answer that. This is a good time to talk about sabbath as shopping. It is not a good time to talk about sabbath as watching football. Does it really make me a better man to watch three to six hours of something violent with loud, annoying, materialistic commercials, or would that time be better spent reading, talking with your spouse, in silence, playing with the children? I guess that is not a very good example at all. That is leisure. I'll find better examples.

Contrast leisure with two days that I had this week. We had a staff retreat. We had six hours of meeting after meeting after meeting. It does not sound very restful, but we were sitting on the dock at a lake up north. We started our meetings with the eyes of our hearts being opened to what was around us. We started by listening to what Calvin calls the fifth Gospel. John Calvin was one of the starters of the Reformation, and he said, "God wrote Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and then He wrote a fifth Gospel and He put us in it." It is the world of nature, Calvin said, and when you hear the birds, when you really *hear* the birds, when you are slow enough to see the mountains or to feel the cool of the stream, you know in a different way that there is a God. Our staff started our meetings by praying for how nature could remind us of the faithfulness of God. Somebody prayed that laughing water reminded us that God's love never fails. The sun was a reminder that we don't have to push it up to make it happen. The walk of the ants across the sidewalk was a reminder that they were burdened, and we are not meant by God to be ants.

Sabbath is not leisure even though God expects His children to play on the Sabbath. Sabbath is not entertainment because, left in front of the TV or at the shopping mall, we amuse ourselves to death. Sabbath is mostly about finding sacred moments, moments where I stop long enough for the God who is always present to feel a little closer to me, to give me life that is really life. Stopping on the Sabbath does not mean vegging in front of a TV, but it means what the psalmist says.

<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God...."

Only as you are still will you know that there is a God right around you. Sabbath means looking with different eyes. Opening the eyes of our heart instead of saying, "Where did that darn kid go?" Cataloging all the things I have to do. Making lists. It is seeing what God has done, and then it is listening whether it is hearing the laughter or the squeal of children. You know, when you are young as a preacher, you get a little freaked out when this kid is just going crazy over there because you know that none of them are listening to you, and you are afraid they were never listening to you before. Now when I hear the kids scream, I go "God, how cool is that, that some parents have loved their children enough to bring them in here." Hearing a child is like hearing God say, "I love you." The call of a bird: "I made you." We stop. We look. We listen. The Sabbath is a time where we are restored. Rest is restoring. When we rest, we are restored. When we thank God for all the things that we have forgotten to thank God for through this last week, gaining a sense that God, the same God, will be with us tomorrow.

Let me pray for you. This is so important that God put it in the top ten. Do not let rest be stolen from you or you will neither live nor work nor love the way God intended you to. Let me pray for you that you and I submit to God, set aside time for Sabbath, for the rest of our souls. In Africa

they often say that they have to wait outside the sanctuary for their souls to catch up with their bodies. My prayer is that your soul has caught up with your bodies so that all of you can rest.

Lord Jesus, You lived a very busy life and yet frequently it says that You would take time out to be by Yourself and yet not alone. Frequently You would rest when You could do no more. Lord, many of us find it hard to rest because we are addicted to noise, and we find it hard to stop because our hands twitch without a BlackBerry. We find it hard to thank because we are worried people. I pray for my sisters and my brothers here that in the busyness of their lives, You will not only keep them coming back here to find rest for their souls and quiet for their hearts, but you will give them sabbath along the way, rest stops that they might hear the voice of the one who says,

<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*