

Karen Hollis | Oct 11, 2020
Deuteronomy 5:12-15 | Psalm 148 | Luke 13:10-17
Season of Creation 5: Sabbath
Sermon Title: Sabbath

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

During the first few months of COVID, along with concern about the well-being of the world, I kept hearing people breathe a sigh of relief; there was a general consensus particularly among introverts, that this season was giving us a great deal of permission to simply be. Without much guilt, we've been able to say no to some things, cancel others, take a nap, be less productive, to cocoon in our homes and unplug from the world a bit. We really didn't have a choice before protocols were put into place and the numbers went down. It's interesting, but not surprising to me that it took a pandemic for the world to stop, for all of us to hit the pause button. It's interesting in part because God has been telling us for thousands of years how important it is to regularly take a pause.

I took a cursory tour through scripture this week, noting how Sabbath is used throughout. The first occurrence of course is God resting on the 7th day of creation, after which this observance is gifted

to the Israelites in the desert at Mt. Sinai.

Throughout the rest of the Torah (Gen, Exod, Num, Lev, Deut), the Israelites not only remember Moses' word from God about the Sabbath, but worked out how they were going to observe it. They wrote rules and threats that served as a buffer around the law so the people were sure not to violate it.

By the time Jesus was born, the day that was intended to be kept holy to the Lord had become more about enforcing the rules. During Jesus' ministry we see him time and time again breaking the Jewish rules on the Sabbath and consistently winning the arguments that followed. Is the Sabbath for slavery or freedom? Suffering or rejoicing? Is it a time for closed hearts or open ones?

The scripture tour of Sabbath basically ends in the Acts of the Apostles, where it seems time is punctuated by Sabbaths. Because in the first century Sabbath is the day everyone is available to take a break, because it is their time to reflect on God in their lives, and because it is the day everyone gathers, it is also the ideal day for followers of Jesus to preach and share the good news that God's way is freedom and new life.

I have had varied success with observing a Sabbath day over the years; how about you? While I was in seminary I took a Friday Sabbath . . . often staying in bed until 2p, and spending much of the rest of the day having something to eat or sitting with a cup of tea. I was able to do all of the things the rest of the week required of me as long as I had that one day to collapse. During that same season a seminary friend of mine was teaching her teenage daughters about keeping the Sabbath. She said, “this is the one day you don’t have to do homework or chores around the house.” She described the Sabbath as permission giving.

I found it helpful to reframe it this way . . . though not enough to practice Sabbath consistently. Especially when we are busy, which is pretty often, it is hard to put things down. Sometimes I resent the day away from tasks or am unable to enjoy it because a pile of tomatoes is staring at me or paperwork sits unfinished.

Author Wayne Muller writes some stronger language on the topic: “In the trance of overwork, we take everything for granted. We consume **things, people and information**. We do not have time to

savor this life, nor to care deeply and gently for ourselves, our loved ones, or our world; rather, with increasingly dizzying haze, we use them all up, and throw them away.”¹

There is this huge resistance in our culture to pausing . . . and it’s good to name that in the trance of overwork, all of the moving and doing helps us keep at bay the thoughts and feelings that are uncomfortable and painful. Our Sabbath practice then includes finding ways to acknowledge those tender places that keep us from pausing . . . without being consumed by them. Our Sabbath practice then includes finding a way to enter into this “time set apart” without it being overwhelming.

Jesus went a step further and said it is good to heal on the Sabbath. After all, this day is about freedom from the things that bring us discomfort and pain, that keep us isolated; it is a time to praise God for God’s goodness and to remember we are beloved children of God. Sabbath is time set apart to connect with our authentic gratitude for life and for every blessing that comes from the earth . . . not only is the earth worthy of our praise, it teaches us about Sabbath . . . about gratitude, like the eagle watching

¹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, 4-6

the sunset; about slowing down, like the rock that is gradually covered by the tide; about presence, like the tree that creates habitat for living things; and about connection, like pairs of ravens that move as one in the sky. Creation offers invitations into the slower pace of Sabbath, into the deep peace of knowing we belong to God.