**Sabbatical 2022 Reflections**

**Mark 2:23-28**

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Today’s text describes Jesus’ first Sabbath controversy when his disciples plucked grain on the sabbath, clearly violating the Sabbath in the minds of the Pharisees. The Pharisees challenged Jesus with a question, “Why are your disciples breaking the Sabbath?”, and he responded with a question, “Don’t you remember when King David did the same?” (1 Samuel 21:1-6). Jesus didn’t appeal to the law (Deut 23:25) but to David’s men taking showbread when they fled from Saul, though the bread was reserved for priests (1 Sam 21:1-6). Jesus did so because he is the new and better David, the Promised Messianic King. Those who belong to Him have a right to eat on the Sabbath. The Sabbath pointed to and is fulfilled in Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Heb 4:9-11). Under the New Covenant, we are no longer required to keep the Sabbath like Israel was commanded to under the Old Covenant. This has been my understanding of the Sabbath for years. But I have abused this truth to fulfill my drivenness and propensity toward overworking. But as I have gotten older, this has caught up with me the last couple of years leaving me depleted. More on that in a moment.

CCC provides it’s pastors a sabbatical every seven years for rest and renewal. At the start of my previous sabbatical, I went back to school to earn a doctorate. But this time I had several friends recommend a sabbatical coach to help me focus on rest, renewal, and recalibration. Pastoral sabbaticals are be a time of unplugging from the demands of ministry. I am grateful to the elders, the advisory board, our staff, and many others who made it possible for me to take my sabbatical. I want to spend the rest of my time reflecting on the three components of my sabbatical: rest, renewal, recalibration.

**Reflections:**

**Rest**

I am a type A personality with a deep seated bent to be productive and a drive to always do more. So, life and ministry in the last few years left me depleted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The one who suffered the most from my fatigue was my wife Karen, I did not have the energy to invest in my marriage. All that to say, I was ready for a sabbatical. I needed rest because of imbalances in my life. I did not use my alarm for the entire sabbatical unless I had something planned. I slept in everyday which, if you know me, is highly unusual. To disengage from ministry, we left Alaska for six weeks. It was hard to disengage, I wanted to come in and was emailing Sky about loose ends the first few weeks. I could not even watch the livestream because I found myself re-engaging. We went to Mexico to rest and spend focused time together. Then we spent three weeks in Coeur d’Alene, ID with Karen’s parents and go fly fishing. We had regular meetings with our sabbatical coach the whole time. Along with rest I sought spiritual renewal.

**Renew**

I spent focused time with Jesus and Karen. I spent the sabbatical studying the book of Hebrews purely for my own benefit. It was glorious to read Hebrews, listen to the voice of God, and reflect on how Jesus is better than anything and everything. My affections for Jesus were being renewed. I lingered in it daily, giving ample time for the Spirit of God to massage those truths into my mind and heart. I had free time to take tangents and paths I would normally ignore because of time constraints. All the while my sabbatical coach was prodding at my drivenness and my relationship with Karen. This led to me considering how to recalibrate and re-enter life and ministry.

**Recalibrate**

By recalibrate, I mean making the necessary changes in my life to finish well. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. I live life more like a sprint. Leadership expert Robert Clinton says that fewer than 30% of leaders finished well. So I have given a lot of thought to re-entry so I can come back and pace myself to finish well. The writer of Hebrews says, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:1-2a).” My hope in finishing well is to look to Jesus and in the promise of Paul, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6). So here is my re-entry plans as I come back:

* Set a realistic work schedule
* Prioritize people over tasks
* Regular spiritual retreats
* Yearly study break
* More prayerful with God and with people
* Mission

You may never enjoy a sabbatical like me, but you can set up rhythms in place for rest and renewal. Though we are not obligated to keep the Sabbath, the principle of rest and renewal is still necessary. None of us can keep going 24/7. To do so erodes the soul. What are you doing for rest and renewal? Are you seeking to be balanced in your work and personal life?

Life Group Questions:

Icebreaker: Tell us your name and how many hours of sleep do you average?

Head

1. What questions or thoughts did this sermon raise in your mind?
2. If Jesus is our sabbath rest (Heb 4:9-11), how do we still prioritize rest and renewal today?
3. How do you protect yourself physically, spiritually and emotionally?

Heart

1. Do you know someone who is driven? How would you describe them?
2. Do you ever struggle with working too much or neglect other aspects of life because of work?
3. What rhythms in your own life do you practice for rest and renewal?
4. What do your rhythms look like?
5. Is there a connection between being physically tired and spiritually tired? Describe what you mean.

Hand

1. What is God teaching me/us through this message?
2. Are there ways you need to recalibrate your life?
3. What rhythms do you need to reboot or add into your life?
4. How is God asking you to respond to this message?