

Pentecost 11, Prop 16, Year C  
August 24, 2025

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done on creation.

How do we do Sabbath? How should we do Sabbath?

*If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;  
if you call the sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;  
if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;  
then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

I fear we have done a great injustice to Sabbath as Christians, somewhat reminiscent of Lent. For so long, Lent has been the season of deprivation: give up chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, television; less time on the internet, texting, being on 24-hour watch for new emails. To say nothing of Alleluias. The Lectionary psalms distinctly lean towards “how long, o Lord, how long” - God’s forsaking mankind, always with the knowledge that in six weeks or so, we will no longer be forsaken but will be drowning in the sweet smell of lilies and hyacinth. More recently, the Lenten trend has been toward adding rather than giving up: teaching or joining a study group, increasing physical activity, devoting more time to charitable or care-giving activities. Similarly, many feel church attendance is an occasion of deprivation, that the last place one should be on the Sabbath is in church, that they are being deprived of their freedom; after all, many of us are free from weekday jobs on Sundays. And the rationalization for this thinking is boundless: there’s the classic “I go on hikes or am in the woods on Sundays so I’m communing with God;” my family gets together every Sunday, it’s the only day we can be a family; I can’t fight the entire school system, when my kids have soccer, football, basketball, track, swimming, baseball and I need to be there to support them; we have three jobs between us and Sunday’s the only day we have time to go shopping.

A friend recently said to me that one of his wife’s parting remarks to him was, “Make your bed every day; if you stop making your bed, everything else will go to hell!” How

would it be if instead of thinking of church-going as deprivation, as time-wasted in an enclosure, we might think of it as a gathering of hearts and minds and souls – each unique, some divided – outside of ourselves, away from the imprisonment of I-me-my, in a simultaneous act of resistance against the world “out there,” focusing every bit of ourselves on the One Holy Hidden Being, Creator and Preserver of all that is? And that after we have rubbed shoulders and hugged and been hugged, and laid eyes upon and listened to those around us with whom we don’t always agree and with whom we don’t particularly wish to spend a great deal of time and having been nourished by the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation, we go back into the world rejoicing that we have intentionally delighted in God and we have made the choice to be with others as we delight in God together.

And we have delighted God!

God created us to tend the garden, to tend to the garden. Not just the plants and animals. On the Sabbath, let us gather together, because if we stop gathering together, then we will stop caring about each other and everything else will go to hell. Think of church-going Sabbath as a rehearsal. Now that we know we can love others and be with others in church for an hour or so without our smart phones, we are ready for you, Lord, to send us out into the world to do the work You have given us to do.

So why have I spent the last few minutes talking at you about folks that don’t come to church? Well, as they say, you are God’s voice and God’s hands and God’s feet. You are God’s messengers. *How beautiful are the feet of those who spreadeth the Gospel of peace.* Go out into the world and tell folks about a place where they can spend an hour or so once a week with strangers as well as friends, where they won’t be judged for what they believe or don’t believe, where they won’t be politically classified, where they can speak freely, and where they can find calm from whatever storm they find themselves in. A place where they can delight in God and be God’s delightful community: a community of Sabbath rest and welcome.

(Preached at St Stephen’s, Middlebury)