

Delight in The Sabbath

Luke 13:10-17



Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.’ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?’ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Sermon

I have noticed that, as more and more people start staying home as a response to the Coronavirus, a lot of really amazing support and advice has started to filter out. I have heard so many suggestions this week for ways to survive our new socially distant lifestyles and things to do until we can go back to life as it was. They include:

- “20 Rules for Working from Home”
- “100 Free Ways to Keep Yourself Busy During Quarantine”
- “60 Distractions for Social Distancing.”
- I’ve even seen people start watching old recordings of Broncos games, which isn’t so bad I guess, because at least you get to watch them win!

But, I’m starting to wonder if maybe God wants us to do more than just distract ourselves with free movies until we can go back to our lives in a few weeks? I’m wondering if God wants to use this time when businesses close down, and work stops for many of us, and we settle into a life alone or with our family - not as something for us to just endure, but as a time of Sabbath when we can let ourselves rest and be just who God made us to be.

Now, I'm **not** saying that God has sent this virus to do us harm. I **do not** believe that it is a test, **and certainly not** a punishment. Because we know the God of mercy so much better than that, and the God we know would not want to cause us harm. But, I do believe that God can take the struggle of having to distance ourselves from one another, and use it for good.

Because God always wants what is best for us, the first Sabbath was given to the people of Israel, when God set them free from slavery in Egypt. God wanted to show them that he was a different kind of Lord than Pharaoh had been. Where Pharaoh commanded work, God commanded Sabbath.

The passage we read from Luke's gospel even shows that God is willing to break God's own rules to help us find what is best for us, and set us free to be ourselves.

- When Jesus walked the earth, people took the fourth commandment a lot more seriously. They didn't do any work on the Sabbath Day. They wouldn't even untie an animal so that it could drink when it was thirsty, but would have to go way out of their way to make sure that water was set up for them beforehand. And Jesus broke that rule. He broke that commandment. He did work on God's Holy Sabbath Day because he saw someone who needed his help and he wanted to set her free.

And I think God wants to set us free as well. It has been said that "Sabbath is the time and space when we are most fully ourselves." We are not producing things or services for other people. We are not trying to live up to anyone else's expectations for us. We are simply resting in who God made us to be.

- At too many points in our history, we have made Sabbath into this mandated boredom, where we act like God wants us to sit around and stare at each other. I think that's what the Pharisees had done to God's Sabbath Law in Jesus time as well. And that's why he broke their law, to show them that it's so much more than that. Isaiah says that Sabbath should be a "delight."
- Sabbath is when God frees us to be ourselves. It's why Jesus broke that law, to set this woman free from an ailment that had bound her for eighteen years, and ailment that wouldn't let her stand up straight and be proud of who she was, but forced her to suffer, hunched over. She was defined in society's eyes, not by the person God had made, but by the ailment that stopped her from living fully.

So, how do we do this? How do we live out the Sabbath as God desires? Well, the truth is I think you probably know better than I do. And if not, you've got some time to let God show you.

- But, maybe it means studying that subject that always fascinated you, but you never knew how to make any money from.
- Maybe it means learning that craft that you always respected, but you worried about what someone else would say when they saw you doing it.

- Maybe it's something like my favorite poet and farmer, Wendell Berry, who wrote a whole book of poems by going out and walking around his farm every Sunday and writing down the things God showed him.
- Or maybe it's as simple as just being you, in everything that means, even with all your little quirks, and having faith that God loves you just the way you are - and striving to practice that kind of confidence in what God has made in you, everywhere you go.

Imagine what the world would be like, when all of this is over, if we all took this time to rest in Sabbath, to let Christ come over and untie the ropes that bind us, and lead us to the waters of a life lived fully. Imagine what the world would be like if we took this time to let God set us free, to practice being exactly who God made us to be - not an employee or a customer of someone else, not another cog in someone else's wheel, but ourselves: these amazing creations of the God of the Universe.

I, for one, yearn to live in that world: where all of us have been set free by Christ, in the Sabbath. I pray we won't come out the other side of this as people who are exhausted by the labors and expectations heaped upon us by the world, but as people who are rested and have been restored by the God who loves us enough to help us stand up straight, grateful for the blessings that God has bestowed upon us.

And as you receive this blessing, be careful not to forget, that this blessing that God gives us in the Sabbath, it's not just for us. But, it is given so that it can be shared. When God freed the Israelites from Egypt that's not all God wanted to free them from, God also wanted to save them from using their new freedom to become like Pharaoh's slave drivers - so God reminded them, right there in that fourth commandment, that this rest was for everyone amongst them - even the animals and the slaves, even the foreigner who lived amongst them. And today we should be careful to remember that it applies to grocery store workers, and pharmacists, delivery drivers, and nurses in hospitals as well. And as they go on working through our long Sabbath day, we should remember them in our prayers, do what we can to relieve them of their burdens, and treat them with all the respect they are due as beloved creations of the Lord of The Universe, just like us.

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