

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Holy Days: Give it a Rest!”

Rev. Rachel Hamburger

January 31, 2021

God spoke all these words:

I am God, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a life of slavery.

No other gods, only me.

No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them and don't serve them because I am God, your God, and I'm a most jealous God, punishing the children for any sins their parents pass on to them to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation of those who hate me. But I'm unswervingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

No using the name of God, your God, in curses or silly banter; God won't put up with the irreverent use of his name.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. Don't do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days God made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the Sabbath day; he set it apart as a holy day.

Honor your father and mother so that you'll live a long time in the land that God, your God, is giving you.

No murder.

No adultery.

No stealing.

No lies about your neighbor.

No lusting after your neighbor's house—or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don't set your heart on anything that is your neighbor's.

Exodus 20:1-17

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That word from last week was such a word for us today, trusting God's power on the world's behalf, on ours - moving forward in His sure provisions. For His people on the edge of the wilderness, God made all kinds of provisions, including the very words that would give Life to them, and forever mark them as His own.

[Read Exodus 20:1-17]

We might think about what it would have been like for God's people to be rescued, to be free after Egypt. There was so much for them to shed in the 40 years in the wilderness; almost like a detox period from all that darkness and despair. So much would be new, again a God who loved them, One God, learning how to honor that God, how to treat and honor others, how to work with purpose (with God as their boss), and then how to experience this new thing called REST. For 400 years they had only known work, like so many in our world, the work of making bricks, seven days a week of producing, back-breaking, anxious, under the command of Pharaoh and then to hear this 4th command, as they were on the edge of a new and different life:

“Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day. Six days a week are for your daily duties and your regular work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no work of any kind, nor shall your son, daughter, or slaves—whether men or women or your cattle or your house guests. For in six days the Lord made the heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them, and rested the seventh day; so he blessed the Sabbath day and set it aside for rest.”

Rest! Perhaps I want to ask at this point - how many of us know what rest is, and who take it, not only as part of God's will, but as part of His provision? Perhaps for our world the whole concept of rest has been a revolutionary idea, if we know what rest really is, what God means by it, how God called it Sabbath.

Do you remember the Blue Laws? For all the years they were in practice, they were an attempt to observe Sabbath restricting or banning some or all Sunday activities to promote the observance of a day of worship or rest, or a day of rest for mail carriers, workers and their families, with stores closed and commercial activity ceased. Doing a little Wikipedia research, I found that in 1781 Samuel Peters noted that blue laws went back to the Puritans, who prohibited various activities, recreational and commercial from Saturday evening through Sunday night. And then in the 19th century, Protestant moral reformers called for the enactment of stricter Sunday laws. Numerous Americans were arrested for working, keeping an open shop, drinking alcohol, traveling and recreating on Sundays, all the things you couldn't do.

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Set against our popular sayings, “No rest for the weary,” or “A woman's work is never done,” God's was. And His rest was to be the basis for ours. I couldn't help but wonder, as God rested on the 7th day, what He did on that day? (do you wonder, too?) What do we do with our rest? I imagine that God looked upon the work of his hands, his creation which was very good, and had sheer delight. Maybe rest and delight are connected.

I experienced a kind of delight back several years ago with my dear friends Bill and Sandy, who are some of the most productive people I know; in teaching, mentoring, ministry including an after-school language tutoring ministry with children.

I remember several times sharing dinner with Sandy and Bill on Saturday evening. They had made fully all the preparations for that Saturday meal and for the meals for Sunday. They had done all their other work and preparations for the next 24 hours. It was the start of their Sabbath, Saturday evening 6:00 p.m. through Sunday evening. The dinner table was beautifully set with special baked unleavened bread, simple warm foods. There was a special prayer before the candles were lit.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us this Sabbath. You are the author of peace. You who made the Sabbath holy, who called upon us to honor this Sabbath, enter our home this night. Grant us and all our loved ones rest. May the lights of the candles drive out from among us the spirit of anger and the spirit of fear. Send your blessingenter our hearts this night through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

That meal was the beginning for them, and for me with them a joyful time, a time of slowing the pace, letting go, putting normal work aside.

My mind was also drawn back to the late Eugene Peterson, author, pastor, writer of that paraphrase of Scripture, *The Message*, who tells of how he and his wife often would spend their Sabbath day (which for them was a weekday) hiking through the mountains of Montana where they lived, talking, being quiet, reflecting on God's Word in the Scriptures, delighting in God's creation, birds, wildflowers, rivers. That's a picture of what Sabbath rest can be. A day of renewing, refreshing, reflecting (perhaps on a Psalm), listening to let our souls catch up with our bodies to find things that don't deplete us, but replenish us in God. Maybe to "do nothing" for a bit! To ask ourselves what would happen if I leave the pile on the desk, put the to-do list in a drawer, leave the office, set aside cumbersome committee duties? To lay our normal work down (whatever that is) and just stop, stop producing, stop making those bricks, and just be with ourselves, with others, and with God.

Isn't it true that in our world today many have to work every day/hour just to survive? There is no opportunity for sheer rest. Many have to continue regular duties on top of new ones, because of where we are. People are confined to home, little space to recreate, or even little spirit for recreating. God knows. He included in these words of rest the servants, the guests, the foreigners, all people. "Come to me, Jesus said, "ALL you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest."

Perhaps you, as I am, are continuing to learn that Sabbath rest is less about legalism and much more about love, about relationship with God, that Sabbath rest is important to Him because He wants to be with us. It is less about the specific day, the exact time, and more about the intention on his part, to bless us, and refill our emptiness/even our restlessness, and intention on our part, to be with Him, to listen, thank Him for what is without striving for yet more. It is time to think about things that matter to Him, be his hands and heart to another person, perhaps one who has to work all the time, to show mercy, as Jesus did over and over on the Sabbath, to lose our own fears about "producing" for our own sake, to rest, to really rest in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Tony, our wonderful sexton, said to me this morning what is the truest thing of all, "Jesus is our Sabbath! He is where we find our rest!!"

Long before our Lord Jesus came to earth, but surely in Him and through His Spirit, the Prophet Isaiah spoke to God's people. "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.” The author of Hebrews: “So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also ease from their labors as God did from his; let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.”

I think it does take work (intention) to rest, to obey in this way. Sabbath Rest is a form of resistance to/within our fearful culture. It is a healing for our anxiety; it is a way to trust God, and to make this prayer:

“God, please do what I can’t; please work what I am not able. Take care of what I’m so concerned about. I know that you can and will. Let me be still and know that you are God.”

It is a healing also for our pride in thinking that life all depends on us. It is a time to “give it a rest,” and as the old hymn goes, “Take from our Souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace.”

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Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us this Sabbath. You are the author of peace. You who made the Sabbath holy, who called upon us to honor this Sabbath, enter our home this night. Grant us and all our loved ones rest. May the lights of the candles drive out from among us the spirit of anger and the spirit of fear. Send your blessingenter our hearts this night through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

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“Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day. Six days a week are for your daily duties and your regular work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no work of any kind, nor shall your son, daughter, or slaves—whether men or women or your cattle or your house guests. For in six days the Lord made the heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them, and rested the seventh day; so he blessed the Sabbath day and set it aside for rest.”

Rest! Perhaps I want to ask at this point - how many of us know what rest is, and who take it, not only as part of God's will, but as part of His provision? Perhaps for our world the whole concept of rest has been a revolutionary idea, if we know what rest really is, what God means by it, how God called it Sabbath.

Do you remember the Blue Laws? For all the years they were in practice, they were an attempt to observe Sabbath restricting or banning some or all Sunday activities to promote the observance of a day of worship or rest, or a day of rest for mail carriers, workers and their families, with stores closed and commercial activity ceased. Doing a little Wikipedia research, I found that in 1781 Samuel Peters noted that blue laws went back to the Puritans, who prohibited various activities, recreational and commercial from Saturday evening through Sunday night. And then in the 19th century, Protestant moral reformers called for the enactment of stricter Sunday laws. Numerous Americans were arrested for working, keeping an open shop, drinking alcohol, traveling and recreating on Sundays, all the things you couldn't do.

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Set against our popular sayings, “No rest for the weary,” or “A woman's work is never done,” God's was. And His rest was to be the basis for ours. I couldn't help but wonder, as God rested on the 7th day, what He did on that day? (do you wonder, too?) What do we do with our rest? I imagine that God looked upon the work of his hands, his creation which was very good, and had sheer delight. Maybe rest and delight are connected.

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Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us this Sabbath. You are the author of peace. You who made the Sabbath holy, who called upon us to honor this Sabbath, enter our home this night. Grant us and all our loved ones rest. May the lights of the candles drive out from among us the spirit of anger and the spirit of fear. Send your blessingenter our hearts this night through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

That meal was the beginning for them, and for me with them a joyful time, a time of slowing the pace, letting go, putting normal work aside.

My mind was also drawn back to the late Eugene Peterson, author, pastor, writer of that paraphrase of Scripture, *The Message*, who tells of how he and his wife often would spend their Sabbath day (which for them was a weekday) hiking through the mountains of Montana where they lived, talking, being quiet, reflecting on God's Word in the Scriptures, delighting in God's creation, birds, wildflowers, rivers. That's a picture of what Sabbath rest can be. A day of renewing, refreshing, reflecting (perhaps on a Psalm), listening to let our souls catch up with our bodies to find things that don't deplete us, but replenish us in God. Maybe to "do nothing" for a bit! To ask ourselves what would happen if I leave the pile on the desk, put the to-do list in a drawer, leave the office, set aside cumbersome committee duties? To lay our normal work down (whatever that is) and just stop, stop producing, stop making those bricks, and just be with ourselves, with others, and with God.

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Perhaps you, as I am, are continuing to learn that Sabbath rest is less about legalism and much more about love, about relationship with God, that Sabbath rest is important to Him because He wants to be with us. It is less about the specific day, the exact time, and more about the intention on his part, to bless us, and refill our emptiness/even our restlessness, and intention on our part, to be with Him, to listen, thank Him for what is without striving for yet more. It is time to think about things that matter to Him, be his hands and heart to another person, perhaps one who has to work all the time, to show mercy, as Jesus did over and over on the Sabbath, to lose our own fears about "producing" for our own sake, to rest, to really rest in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Tony, our wonderful sexton, said to me this morning what is the truest thing of all, "Jesus is our Sabbath! He is where we find our rest!!"

Long before our Lord Jesus came to earth, but surely in Him and through His Spirit, the Prophet Isaiah spoke to God's people. "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.” The author of Hebrews: “So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also ease from their labors as God did from his; let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.”

I think it does take work (intention) to rest, to obey in this way. Sabbath Rest is a form of resistance to/within our fearful culture. It is a healing for our anxiety; it is a way to trust God, and to make this prayer:

“God, please do what I can’t; please work what I am not able. Take care of what I’m so concerned about. I know that you can and will. Let me be still and know that you are God.”

It is a healing also for our pride in thinking that life all depends on us. It is a time to “give it a rest,” and as the old hymn goes, “Take from our Souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace.”

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No other gods, only me.

No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them and don't serve them because I am God, your God, and I'm a most jealous God, punishing the children for any sins their parents pass on to them to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation of those who hate me. But I'm unswervingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

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