

Chris Murphy

May 12, 2024

Scripture: Genesis 2: 1-3

Sermon Title: The Gift of Sabbath

Prayer...

Introduction:

Normally, on Mother's Day I preach a message that either focuses on empowerment of women or seeing God as Mother. Today is a little different since I plan to speak on The Gift of Sabbath rest. I will share as I begin that the Sacred Feminine that is in all of creation feels restful to me. My experience of the Sacred Feminine, which is the spiritual feminine energy that flows through all of life including each one of us in some mysterious way is calming and restful, full of love and compassion. I especially experience the sacred feminine in the beauty of nature, the wonder of God's creation.

In Genesis 2: 1-3 is we are first introduced to the foundation for Sabbath rest. After creating the beauty of the Heaven and the earth,

the water and the land, the trees and plants, and the animals and humanity, on the seventh day Genesis says that God took a rest.

Wow! God decided to take a break and rest. Now, if you are like me, you wonder what kind of rest are we talking about. Did God take a nap? If so, how long a nap and maybe that was safe before sin entered the world, but I hope that God is not napping now. Then I remember that Jesus took a nap on the boat, but that was okay because God the Father and the Holy Spirit got his back. And doesn't the Bible say that God never sleeps nor slumbers.

Well, I am not sure the story of God taking a rest is meant to raise anxiety. Instead, I believe God taking a rest is a reminder that we all are invited to take a rest regularly and especially on the sabbath day.

Clearly the Hebrew people took to heart Yahweh's own example of rest because we learn in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible after Genesis, that God has commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath Holy.

In Exodus 20, Moses shares the ten commandments and number four is “Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heavens and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day: therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses mentions the 10 commandments again but when he talks about the sabbath, he reminds the Israelites use the sabbath to remember their deliverance from Egypt. Deuteronomy 5: 16 reads, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.”

Jesus as faithful Jew practiced the Sabbath. Jesus surprised people by healing on the sabbath and having his disciples pick grain on the sabbath. He chose to reframe the sabbath and to remind the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath.

Most of us are probably aware that Jewish people today practice the sabbath from Friday sunset through Saturday night fall. They begin the Sabbath with a sacred meal called Shabbat. Shabbat is the Hebrew word for sabbath. It means to cease or stop. The time of Sabbath involves intentional rest and enjoyment of family and God.

If you ever have the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat with a Jewish family, I encourage you to experience it. I have celebrated Shabbat with a Jewish rabbi named Yitzock Adlerstein and his family and it was a wonderful time that included special prayers, amazing food including the tastiest bread you can imagine and wonderful Kosher wine.

You may wonder if sabbath for Jewish people happens on Saturday why do most Christians practice sabbath on Sunday. The short story is that in the early church most Christian were converts from Judaism, so they worshipped on Saturday. Over time with more gentile converts to Christianity Sabbath began to connect sabbath to the day of resurrection and the day of creation, which is the first day of the week or Sunday. The Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century made Sunday a day where people could cease from working, so in that way Sunday also became a more acceptable time for sabbath rest.

As a lifelong Christian I have practiced Sunday worship all my life. I really have never had a season where I did not go to church.

Although I have always attended church, I often have not made Sunday or any other day a sabbath, a day of rest.

Culturally, the average Christian is more relaxed about keeping the sabbath. For many Christians, going to church or engaging in

relationships within a Christian community feels optional and Sundays especially during football season or golf season, are as much about watching TV as anything else we do during the day. If I am honest, I can relate to the idea that we should relax on the sabbath and not create a lot of do's or don'ts on that day. It should be a day of grace rather than a day of rules.

Although, I agree with the focus on grace for Sabbath days, I probably like you also feel a longing that I could have the discipline to make Sundays or another day of the week more intentionally a day of rest and refreshment.

In his book, *The Sabbath Experiment*, Dr. Rob Muthiah gives some suggestions on how to practice the Sabbath with a heart of celebration. Rob by the way is the brother of Rick Muthiah who works at George Fox and is also the son of Lionel Muthiah, who lives at Friendsview.

- Eat a meal together with friends or family.

- Play board games with friends or family.
- Sit around talking and laughing.
- Spend some time alone.
- Watch old home movies.
- Worship with your church family.
- Go for a walk in nature.
- Take a nap.

The main goal of sabbath keeping is to make it a day or a season where you can rest, enjoy the fullness of life, and connect to God, others, and nature in a meaningful way.

Connecting to creation especially makes sense since the inspiration of sabbath rest came from God resting on the seventh day after working to create nature including humanity.

In Rob Muthiah's book, he has a chapter called Slowing down- Sabbath and Creation care in which he highlights the value of connecting to God during the sabbath through time in nature.

Rob writes,

“Sabbath calls us to remember that God is the one who created this world. Sabbath calls for all of creation to rest and be refreshed.

Sabbath invites us to slow down and notice God’s creation all around us. In Sabbath, we have time to notice the plant in the pot outside the front door has started to bloom. We have time to notice the intricate beauty of a spider’s web that has appeared on the side fence. We have time to notice that the basil seeds planted in the garden have failed to sprout, or that the penstemon plants in the yard are dying for some reason. We have time to notice that the leaves of the trees are changing from the bright green of spring to the deeper green of summer. We have time to notice the incredible beauty in people, who hold a special place in God’s created order. When we step into Sabbath time, we have time to slow down and notice. This is but a first step, but it is a step that leads in the direction of caring well for the world entrusted to us.”



I will just add to Rob's words that a special part of my Sabbath experience for many of us is connecting to God's creation through our Newberg Peace Garden.

Personally, I keep sabbath in a few ways. Although I am working on Sunday mornings at church, I do feel the practice of worship is less work and more sacred rest. I experience a deep connection to God on most Sundays as I lead worship and preach. I know I am working but because we are worshipping together it normally feels quite life giving to me.

I also practice Sabbath rest on Sunday afternoons by taking a nap and doing my best to make time for connecting to my family.

Mondays are my day off, which means I also have more time to rest, play, and hang out with my family. Often on Mondays, Karen and I will get out in nature together and have some fun and good conversation. We also make time for prayer, reading, and personal reflection.

Another Sabbath like practice for me involves leading our First Friday Prayer Retreats each month. I purposefully have set up those retreats in a way that enables me to enjoy personal solitude and rest. I make sure every First Friday Prayer Retreat that I walk the Labyrinth in our Peace Garde. I release my worries and concerns to God as I walk into the Labyrinth. I rest in God's presence at the center of the Labyrinth. And then I walk out the Labyrinth continuing a conversation with God as I enjoy nature and prepare to enter back into the mission of Christ in our world.

Sabbath keeping is a growing spiritual practice for me and as you know I will have another opportunity to experience sabbath rest through an extended three month sabbatical this summer.

Here are some details about my upcoming sabbath.

- It will be from June 1<sup>st</sup> to Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>. My first Sunday back will be Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>.

- During this sabbatical, I will focus on rest, refreshment, recreation, and restoration. My goal is to come back with new vision and excitement for ministry as I continue to pastor our congregation. We are in an exciting time as a church family and my prayer is that this summer will equip me and our family as we continue to partner with you in ministry for years to come.
- Practically speaking I am planning three main trips this summer. One will be to California where Karen, Cate, Chiara, and I will see friends and some of Karen's family. We will bond with each other and those we see and we will enjoy experiencing God's presence together possibly in the gardens near Pasadena, CA or maybe on a beach in LaJolla. I am also looking forward to a trip later in the summer to Spokane with my family. At that time, I hope to connect to friends, including some former Whitworth College faculty who mentored me during my years as a student at Whitworth. In July, I am hoping to spend a few days at Mount Angel Abby for some personal

solitude that will include prayer, long walk, spiritual ready, and journaling. Beyond those times away, we will also visit Karen's family in the Seattle area, which is always a nice getaway for us.

- When not traveling, the Murphy's will be in Newberg. We will visit a few other churches in town and we will also take it easy and relax together. This summer will be an extended sabbath.
- As I prepare for my sabbatical, I am inspired by my mom's experience of sabbatical when she had some time away from being a University Professor at Seattle University. As part of her sabbatical she focused on the word remember. She was inspired by the Jewish tradition of Sabbath with its focus on remembering the historic journey of the Jewish people and God's faithfulness to them. As part of remembering her own story, she visited a former teacher of hers that made a great impact on her life.

Here is a reflection from my mom about her time with her former teacher.

“At the beginning of the year, I returned to my undergraduate alma mater and to a wise woman who mentored me during my college years and my early preparation for teaching. Mrs. Ruth Leedy must have been young when I was a student since I began taking her classes in the summer of 1960. But, I never thought of her as young and now I do not think of her as old. As I sat by her bedside at the convalescent home, I could see the effects of aging and stroke as anyone would. She is blind now and on that day I visited she could not talk. Only her closed eye movements suggested an effort to communicate with me. I would like to think that she did hear and understand me as I told her my story, expressed my thanks, stroked her hair, and sang her camp song, *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Give Us Peace) which she taught me so many years before. And, by the

mystery of memory she remains Mrs. Leedy-the vital person God brought into my life when I needed her most.”

My mom goes on to explain that Mrs. Leedy was the one who recognized qualities with her when she began to doubt them.

Mrs. Leedy recognized my mom’s talent for teaching and her interpersonal strengths and qualities for leadership. Mrs.

Leedy listened to my mom’s fears and responded with words of encouragement.

So friends inspired by mom and her sabbatical, I am also

wanting to seek out former faculty mentors who made a

difference in my life and vocation. During my sabbatical, the

words I wish to say most is Thank you.

I want to say thank you to the former faculty mentors who I will

see. I want to say thank you to my family and friends who have

supported me through the years as a chaplain and pastor. I want to start my sabbatical by saying thank you to all of you here at Newberg First Presbyterian Church.

For more than six years, I have served as your pastor, and I am excited for our future together. Thank you for support my three month sabbatical. My prayer is that we both will grow and experience some rest and refreshment this summer as we give thanks to God and connect with God's creation.

As I prepare for sabbatical, I want to remind you that you will be in good hands while I am gone.

Lish Mannerter will be serving in our Worship Coordinator position and Mary Kalesse will serve in our Congregational Care position. Both Lish and Mary have extensive experience as former ministers of other churches. I will also mention that

as Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church USA they have been ordained to lead the church in times like this summer when ministry support is needed. Both are also empowered by Session to lead communion during my absence, so one of them will be responsible for hosting the Lord's Supper the first Sunday of each month. Together they will be preaching a sermon series on Fruit of the Spirit. On May 26h Sunday, we will have a special time to commission them for their service this summer.

Sabbath is a gift. My hope is that we may all experience this gift more and more and that our relationship with God, others, and all of creation will deepen as we celebrate sabbath together.

Let us pray...

Genesis 2:1-3



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2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. 2 On the sixth[a] day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.