

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
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Title: Rest and Work
Text: Exodus 20:8; Hebrews 3:16-4:11

Someone asked what it would be if all the cars in the United States were placed end to end; and the answer was, it would probably be Labor Day Weekend.

Aristotle said, “The end of labor is to gain leisure.”

And someone else said, “Sometimes it’s important to work for that pot of gold. But other times it’s essential to take time off and to make sure that your most important decision in the day simply consists of choosing which color to slide down on the rainbow.”

We struggle with work and rest. Our work flows into our rest with text messages, cell phones and internet constantly finding us even when we’re on the beach somewhere resting. We can no longer “get away” since work often follows us. Rest becomes illusive.

And work is often difficult when so many are without work today because of the economy. Senior citizens are remaining working longer because they’ve lost their retirement and have to work.

It is helpful at this time of year to stop and think biblically about rest and work. In this sermon series on Walking with God, we are looking at Walking with God in Rest and Work.

Some folks today see work as a trial—or maybe as prison. And retirement is being let out of prison—being free to do and go wherever we please. One golfer said he lives to play golf and plays 18 holes 7 days a week.

Well, Scripture says something different about work and about rest. This morning we are looking at the Fourth Commandment which tells us that both work and rest are part of God’s intention for us. If we are walking with God: rest and work are a part of that walk.

Both rest and work are part of God’s intention for us.

Genesis 2, says, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

Listen to that again, “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy---why—because on it he rested.” It was set apart, which is what holy means, because on it God rested. He rested and that’s why he blessed it. It’s holy—set apart from all the days—because God rested.

Often we get side-tracked and think of work as part of the curse after the Fall. It’s not. God worked. In Gen 1:26, before the Fall, Scripture says, “God blessed them—man and

woman—and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

As soon as God created man and woman he gave them two commands—have children and work. We were created to work—to rule over creation as God’s image—as God’s agent, and we were created to rest.

In chapter 2 the second time creation is described with the emphasis this time on man and woman, God laments in 2:6 that there is no man to work the ground. And then in 2:15, again before the Fall, it says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Then in 2:18 God creates a “helper” for man—woman. A helper for man to work along side.

We were created to work. Rest is not an escape from work—Both work and rest are part of God’s plan for creation. Understanding our work, for all of us and not just ministers, as a calling from God, is very Reformed, very Presbyterian understanding of work.

It was Calvin who first put an emphasis that all work is a calling from God and not just calling to the pastorate. David Hall in his book, *The Legacy of John Calvin*, writes, “Calvin’s view of work as having inherent dignity given by our Creator elevated all disciplines and lawful vocations to the status of holy callings. ...

Hall goes on, “Calvin taught that any area of work—farming, teaching, governing, business—could be a valid calling from God, every bit as sacred as serving as a minister. This was a radical change in worldview, which would ultimately alter many economies, cultures, and human lives.”

That’s where the “Protestant work ethic came from.” It came from Calvin’s understanding that all work was a calling from God. Whatever we do, we do it as unto God, for his glory and pleasure. Whether that is milking a cow, tilling a field, fixing the plumbing, healing the sick, teaching, serving in the military. All of our work is a calling from God, it is sacred. It is holy.

God calls us to both work and rest. And work may be many things. For some it’s going off to the office or manufacturing plant each day; for some it’s farm or dairy work; for others it’s caring for children, or elderly parents; or caring for those in the community who need a phone call or card, or visit.

Work isn’t just about earning money—after all, Scripture says that God worked and he didn’t do it for money. Work is reaching out beyond ourselves to do something that God has called us to do for other people. It’s part of our caring for our neighbor—by growing food for him to eat; or teaching our neighbor’s children in school; or taking a casserole to our neighbor. Or praying for our neighbor. Work is doing something for someone else. Work is God’s intention for us—he calls us to work.

What is the Sabbath rest all about?

Sabbath means “to rest” “to cease.” To rest or cease, you have to be doing something you’re ceasing from. God has ordered our time. Our time, our days, belong to God.

We would not exist if God had not created us. Our days are a gift that came from God. And God rules over our days and hours.

God says in the fourth commandment---your days belong to me. Your time is mine. You are to work, but you are also to rest on the Sabbath. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work....” Two “shalls”—not “maybes” or “perhaps you might want tos” —You shall work and you shall not work.

The Fourth commandment is based on two events—Creation and the Exodus. When the commandment is given in Exodus 20 the Sabbath rest is based on God’s resting after Creation. In Deuteronomy 5, when the Commandments are repeated, the Sabbath rest is based on God’s freeing the people from Slavery in Egypt—the Exodus.

The events are related. We were created by God to work and rest as part of our relationship with God. If God is our God—then our time and how we spend it is his to decide. The Hebrew slaves in Egypt couldn’t choose to work and rest and worship.

So, God freed the Hebrews FROM slavery in Egypt TO work, rest, and worship. We are freed through Christ FROM being slaves to sin TO worship God and serve God through work and rest.

We are also commanded to keep the Sabbath because by observing the Sabbath we “remember.” “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” We stop what we are doing and turn our hearts upward. We ought to do that everyday, every hour. But, once a week, we stop everything and remember. We remember God is the creator and redeemer and sustainer. The Sabbath is a remembrance of God. The order of our days brings God’s mighty works to our mind. The time is a reminder of God and his creation of us and his freeing us from slavery—for us it is slavery to sin.

Why are we called to obey the Sabbath?

First, because we are being conformed to the image of God and that’s what God does. If we want to bear the family resemblance, we behave like the Father does. God works and rests. So we too who bear the image of God, must work and rest.

Second, the rhythm of work and rest is built into creation. Even non-Christians are to rest. Even animals and the land are to be given a period of rest. When the French Revolution occurred, one the things they banned was the Sabbath. The French Revolution in 1789 was a reaction against the Catholic Church—so they wanted to purge Christianity from their life. But the interesting thing is that they re-instituted the Sabbath because society

couldn't function without it. People got too sick and too tired when they tried to work 7 days a week. And if you've ever tried to work 7 days a week you know it's true. You burn out.

The Third reason God commanded the Sabbath is because it is a sign of the Covenant. The Ten Commandments are God's covenant with his people. Every time we work and rest on the Sabbath, we are demonstrating to the world that we are part of the covenant. Our rest and worship on Sunday witnesses to our neighbors and the world that we are children of God—in a covenant with God. We obey God. Our time is his. And he has said—work 6 days and rest on the Sabbath.

You may not know how to speak to your neighbors about Christ, but they know you are a Christian every time they see your car back out of the driveway on Sunday morning. They know who you worship.

The fourth reason we are called to keep the Sabbath is because it is the way we learn to trust in God's provision. We don't run the world. It's not our effort, hard work, brains or brawn that runs the world. Remember Atlas with the world on his shoulders. Well the world is not on our shoulders—it's on God's shoulders. He's got the whole world in his hands. The world is not in our hands or on our backs.

Exodus 20 is when God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, but it is Exodus 16 when God began to give manna to the people. Remember the instructions with the manna were that they could only gather enough for each day's needs. If they tried to gather more, it would rot. But, on the 6th day they could gather twice as much so that they would have enough for the 7th day and would not have to work gathering manna. But, some people didn't trust God to provide--they wanted to trust themselves and hoard up some extra so they could rely on themselves. And when they did that, the manna rotted.

God is the provider. God is the creator. God is the redeemer. If God rested on the Sabbath, do we think we have to work on the Sabbath to provide for ourselves because 6 days aren't enough? It's putting our trust in ourselves and our efforts and work and not trusting God even enough to rest.

Human beings have always had a Sabbath problem. We either disregard the Sabbath, or we get meticulous about how to observe it. In either case, we miss the point. It's a gift.

Disregarding the Sabbath is rampant today. Stores are open on Sunday in a way they weren't even 20 years ago. And in the last 10 years or so, youth sports games now are held on Sunday—especially tournaments. And with both husband and wife working and sometimes on opposite shifts and long hours, Sunday is often the only day they see each other and can do errands. Internet is up on the Sabbath, our cell phones ring even on Sunday.

But, God took the Sabbath very seriously. In Exodus 31:14, God tells Moses, "You are to observe My Sabbaths; for this is the sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are

to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death.”

And in Numbers 15:32, when a man is found gathering wood on the Sabbath, he is put to death by stoning. That’s hard for us to understand –we’re apt to say, “what the big deal, so he gathered wood on the Sabbath?”

The prophets throughout the OT often speak of the people’s sin as they break the Sabbath. Nehemiah after the exile, took strong steps to stop buying and selling on the Sabbath.

So, one issue for us is disregarding the Sabbath and continuing to work as usual. The flip side of that is that people who do to keep the Sabbath sometimes make up meticulous laws about the Sabbath. The Mishnah was the rabbis’ interpretation of God’s law. According to the Mishnah-- the rabbis-- a Jew could only travel a certain short distance on the Sabbath. If he wanted to go further, before the Sabbath, he would travel a Sabbath-day’s journey, find a tree, and put food under it. He’d say, “This is my home.” Then he went home. On the seventh day of the week he walked a Sabbath-day’s journey to the tree, took the food, ate it and said, “This is my home, now I can go another Sabbath-day’s journey.” He manipulated the law. (Brisco, p58)

The rabbis’ rules and regulations which were designed to help people keep the spirit of the law became an end in themselves. Bound up by restrictions and regulations, the people lost the whole sense of love and honoring God.

At one point in Jewish history when their enemies attacked, the Jews maintained, “To pick up our swords and defend ourselves would mean carrying a burden.” So they laid down their swords and 1,000 of them were massacred.

According to the rabbis, you could not carry a load that weighed more than a fig on the Sabbath. Therefore, you could pick up your child on the Sabbath but not if the child was holding a stone.

Well, what is a proper understanding of the Sabbath?

We have two grandsons: one almost three years and one 16 months. One of the most beautiful sights is when one of those little boys falls asleep in his mother’s or dad’s arms. He sleeps in absolutely perfect peace. He isn’t worried whether there would be enough food for him when he wakes up. He doesn’t worry if Mom bought diapers. He doesn’t fret whether Dad’s job is secure. He doesn’t worry about whether Mom and Dad have health insurance. He isn’t tossing about worrying whether terrorists will strike or if there is global warming that will cause the oceans to rise.

Little Evan is completely at rest in his Mother’s arms; Cameron is completely at rest in his dad’s arms because they trust their mother and dad completely, for everything, always. That’s rest. That’s what we are to do everyday, but on the Sabbath we are especially to stop the hustle and bustle the chasing after whatever—the lawn, the job, the laundry—the have-

tos and should-oughts and must-dos. Instead we're to stop and remember, that even God rested and as his image—he has commanded us to rest—rest is a gift from our loving Creator.

Rest in our Father's arms. Lay down the burdens of guilt that we've been carrying that break our backs and crush our souls. Let go of the must-haves and ought-tos.

Remember God's mighty acts in Creation and Redemption. If he spoke and the stars and the earth and the sun were created, what is impossible for him to do in our lives? Will he not provide food, pay the bills and provide a job in 6 days?

Campbell Morgan, a pastor who lived in the early 1900's explains the difference between Sabbath rest in the Old Testament and the New. He writes, "Until Christ had come, man worked toward his Sabbath. Since Christ, he works from his Sabbath. In the old economy, ..the Sabbath depended upon the work; in the new, the work grows out of the Sabbath." In the OT men worked and the work led to rest. In the NT, we celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection. We begin in Christ, who has redeemed us and claimed us as his own, and our work flows out of that relationship with Christ.

We begin with Christ, who is our foundation. We begin with worshipping our Father through the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit and our work, or our calling, flows out of that relationship of love and power and joy. We learn in worship to rest in that solid, unshakeable, unchangeable relationship with Christ.

Our time is sanctified—holy. Our calendar is ordered by God. He is Lord of our lives and that means, our calendar begins in him —our work flows out of our relationship with him. We rest in him and then out of that rest flows all of our days.

As we rest from our labors on the Sabbath, we enter more fully into the Lord's rest. Our rest is in Christ—now and after we die. Just as our little grandson rests with perfect peace because he is in his mother's arms, we are to rest in perfect peace on the Sabbath because that is a foretaste of our heavenly rest—in Christ.

We rest because we are in the arms of God. Life doesn't depend on us. We can lay down our worries, stop our striving, and calm our spirits because we are perfectly secure, perfectly loved, perfectly forgiven, perfectly cared for —in Christ.

Our rest is in Christ. We are not slaves of the job or the lawn or the groceries. We can lay down our burdens and rest.

Creation and salvation are free gifts of God. We didn't work to earn either one. God created us because he loves us; he redeemed us because he loves us. When we stop our hustling and striving for even one day, it gives us a chance to remember that we don't have to strive and work for God's gifts, they are free—the most precious of gifts are undeserved and overwhelming and free.

Our response to the good news of who God is and our redemption in Christ, is to rest in his love and care. We can stop our striving after wind, stop our yearning after emptiness, stop working to get manna that will rot, and rest in arms of our heavenly father always. And then as we are called by God to work and serve our neighbors, we share the rest with them that we have in Christ and invite them to enter Christ's rest.

To God be the glory. Amen.