

“Remember the Sabbath”

Exodus 20: 8-11; Deuteronomy 5: 12-15

Today, we are beginning our Summer Series entitled, “The Sound of Silence”. During this series, we will be taking a look at the practice of Sabbath-keeping and its many implications for our lives as people of faith.

Now, let me say, I am not advocating this practice for just me because I think I need to be more conscious and aware of how my time is lived out. Actually, I’m advocating the practice of Sabbath-keeping for all of us as a community of faith because I think for us to continue becoming the people God has created us and called us to be we need to remember our connection to God, something I worry has gotten lost in the midst of programs and schedules.

Let me explain: In the June newsletter, I shared a quote from one of my favorite theologian/pastor, Eugene Peterson. He said, “The great reality we are involved in is God. Most of the people around us don’t know that and couldn’t care less. One of the ways God has provided for us to stay aware of and responsive to him in a world that doesn’t care is by Sabbath-keeping. At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate his, quit talking to each other and listen to him.”

Or let me say it a different way: A few weeks ago, I was part of a Clergy Peer group conversation. I usually get together with this group about once a month for retreat and conversation. We talk about life, we talk about church stuff, we talk about things in general. So surprise, surprise, when in this particular gather, we started talking about well....Church. Because you know, what else does a group of pastors talk about when we get together, right?

So we started talking about Church and one person said, "I can't get my people to go out and talk to others about their faith. If we are called to be the alternate voice in the world, to the world, for the world, how can we do that if our people won't talk, even to each other about their faith?"

As I listened to this person speaking, I thought to myself, "Of course we aren't going out and speaking about our God. We have nothing to say. Not because of God but because we have forgotten our connection to God. We have forgotten the story that nourishes us and sustains us. We have forgotten to remember our God."

It was then it really hit me that Church has become something we do instead of being a way for us to grow in our relationship with God and with one another. As a whole, we as people of faith gather on Sunday mornings but we seem to have forgotten what it means to remember whose we are. We seem to have forgotten

what it means to remember who we are. As people of faith, we seem to have forgotten what a gift it is to sit in the silence and listen for the voice of God.

So this idea of Sabbath-keeping began to percolate. I talked about it with the Worship Team. I talked about it with the leadership. And then began asking...What would happen if we, all of us, as a community of faith began practicing Sabbath-Keeping in our lives if only for the summer? What would happen if we as a community of faith intentionally quit our work for a short period of time and contemplated God's work? What would happen if we intentionally quit talking and listened to the sound of silence?

Once again, before anyone starts thinking I have lost my mind with some crazy radical idea, hear me out. The practice of Sabbath is deeply rooted in our story as people of faith. It is a specific Word from God given to the people of God in order to help them become the people God created and called them to be.

Right there in the 10 commandments, number 4 is "Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy." It comes in between all the commandments that tell us how to be in relationship with our God and the other ones that tell us how to be in relationship with our community. As I have lived a while with this idea of practicing Sabbath-keeping in our lives, I am realizing this ordering was no mistake. This particular ordering of commandments was not a fluke that just

happened. This ordering of our lives as the people of God is what centers us, centers us both our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

Here's why I say this: Remember the Sabbath, this taking time to stop our work for a short period of time and contemplating God's work reminds us that there is a way we are called to live out our faith as people of God. This taking time to quit talking and listen to the voice of God helps us recover whose we are and who we are. This whole practice of Remembering the Sabbath redirects us and soon becomes an invitation to rediscover our joy, to rediscover our connection to God and to others. It becomes a way for us to remember the promises of God, promises that fill our lives each and every day, promises that we tend to forget or ignore in the busyness of life.

As people of faith, we tend to think that Sabbath-keeping means no work. And it is that but it is also so much more. Sabbath-keeping becomes an opportunity for us to step back and realign ourselves with the values of the Kingdom of God, values that aren't all about consumption or owning the latest gadget. These Kingdom values help us remember who God is, remember the God we have experienced in our lives. These values such as grace and love help us remember we are so much more than the labels this world tries to place upon us.

For us as people of faith, Sabbath-keeping becomes a concrete way for us to break the destructive cycles that fill our lives, that fill our world, to break the destructive cycles that prevent the fullness of God's promises healing and wholeness from happening for all of God's creation.

If you don't believe me, let me share with you a graphic that I found. It is on the insert found in your bulletin. I'm not going to read it to you. I will ask that you take it home and read over when you get a chance. But I just want to lift up a few numbers for us all: Americans leave 429 million vacation days a year unused. Even if we are out of the office, we are working, enough so that we voluntarily work a day of overtime each week. And here is the one that really gets me: 40 % of Americans check work email while on vacation,...guilty. 50% check it in bed...guilty and....as people of the Table, this one really bothers me ...38% check work email at the dinner table....once again, guilty.

You know, It is hard to break bread with one another, to be in relationship with one another when all our faces are buried in electronic gadgets and we aren't really seeing each other, face to face.

These numbers tell us our natural cycles of life have been disrupted. They show us that we are in chaos, chaos of our creation. Unfortunately, as people of

faith, we have let the world tell the leading story and that story is Work, Use, Consume, More, more more.

That is not our story. That is not what we are told as people of faith. We are told to Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy because in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day.” Think about it. This is what we have forgotten and are called to remember:

“The "divine rest on the seventh day of creation has made clear (a) that YHWH is not a workaholic, (b) that YHWH is not anxious about the full functioning of creation, and (c) that the well-being of creation does not depend on endless work...God rested on the seventh day. God did not show up to do more. God absented himself from the office. God did not show up with anxiety to be sure it was all working.”

As ones made in the image of our Creator, the Creator who worked for six days but rested on the seventh day, our bodies are not designed to go full speed, to be in the do not pass go mode all the time. But somehow we do, somehow we are. and we wonder why we feel so disconnected, disgruntle, and discombobulated.

It is time for us to Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy. To take time to quit our work for a period of time and be present for God, present to God. It is time to remember who we are and whose we are. It is time to remember how God has

worked in our lives, to remember that God is still working in our world, and to remember God has promised to be there for us in the future. As a community of faith, it is time to Remember the Sabbath and embrace it as our opportunity to remember God's commitment to God's promises in our lives.

Now here is the part where I need to be honest with you. I can talk a really good game about the practice of Sabbath-keeping but I will be the first to admit that I don't do it really well in my life. My type A brain cannot comprehend the concept of sitting still, especially if that sitting is supposed to be done in silence. It is hard for me to simply be...and not...not worry, not do, not be busy, not think about what my next step should be...

So please hear me say, this practice of Sabbath-keeping will be just as difficult for me as it may be for some of you. But I want to share something that I remembered which helped take some of the pressure off me as I am beginning to embrace this challenge of keeping the Sabbath in my life and while I'm encouraging all of us to do the same. As Christians, we've been doing this Sabbath thing wrong for a long, long time, almost from the very beginning. No, I'm not talking about getting caught up in schedules and over-programing our lives. I'm talking about we've been practicing Sabbath on the wrong day.

You see, we all assume that the Sabbath is Sunday but in Jewish tradition where the practice of Sabbath keeping actually got its start, the Sabbath is Saturday. It begins on Friday at sun down and ends on Saturday sun down. That period of time starts by gathering around the Table, sharing a meal, and remembering...remembering how God acted in the past to restore God's people time and time again.

Because there were many times during Israel's life when they found themselves disconnected from God, either spiritually or physically. Sometimes even both. It was during those times that they discovered they were at the mercy of someone else, either the Babylonians or Romans or some other conquering world, just fill in the blank. It was during those moments of disconnection that they realized the outside world only saw them as cogs in the machine, as objects to be used and abused. They realized that this perception of use wasn't just limited to only them. Everyone, young and old, male and female, all people regardless of nationality, were seen as something to be used and abused, not seen as sacred or holy, not seen as someone named and claimed as Beloved Children of God. So this time of Sabbath became a way for the Jewish community of faith to say to the outside world, to be the alternate voice in the world, proclaiming loud and clear: "I don't belong to you. I belong to God first and foremost. I belong to God always." It

became a way to say, I am not a cog in the machine. I am a child of God, full of grace, full of love, named and claimed and loved more than I could ever imagine.

In the face of darkness and consumption that threatens to tear the world apart, that is a pretty powerful message. And that is the message that we as people of faith are called to proclaim today. We are called to say through our words and to live out through our actions that People are not objects to be used and abused. God's creation is not to be consumed and destroyed. People, all people, all of God's creation, is made in the image of God, named and claimed as God's own Beloved Children.

We have forgotten God's Word for the people of God. We have forgotten whose we are. We have forgotten who we are. And now is the time to remember so that healing and wholeness can happen for all of God's creation.

So I'm challenging all of us, me included, all of us as individuals and as a community of faith to embrace the practice of Sabbath keeping this summer. I'm challenging all of us to quit our work for a short period of time and take time to contemplate God's work. I'm challenging all of us to quit talking and listen to the sound of silence. I'm challenging all of us to remember the Sabbath and keep it Holy.

For the month of July, the 7th month, we are taking a Sabbath which means no meetings, no church work. Just worship, just remembering. Just Sabbath-Keeping.

Now, don't worry. I'm not turning us loose with no guidance. The good news is that there is no one way to remember the Sabbath and Keep it holy. You can take a day out of your week. You can take a portion out of each day. Whatever works for you, just take time to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And just to help us out a little more. For this series, there are only two guidelines: First, pray and then second, play. Take time to be attentive to the Work of God in our midst. Take time to find joy in our lives. Take time to be present to God. Take time to engage in and enjoy the life giving, life transforming work that is the Kingdom of God. However this works for you, however you are able to incorporate Sabbath into your lives, please do so.

Because in September, for our "What did you do this Summer" Sunday, I will be inviting everyone to come together and share how the experience of Sabbath-keeping opened our eyes to the Kingdom of God in our midst.

It is my hope that we come to realize that it is only by listening to the sound of silence, listening for the voice of God, gathering the wisdom and word of God

for the people of that we are allowed to truly participate in the work of God and become the people God created us and calls us to be.

So this summer, I am asking us all take time to Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. May it be so. Amen.