

Back in July, we started our summer series of Finding Rest and Practicing Sabbath. Which was for me a rather odd concept since Sabbath is typically the busiest day of the week for pastors and to be honest, sometimes difficult for us to find rest and practice sabbath.

Our hope was that during this series and time of worshipping together we would allow ourselves to not just think about living our faith but practicing the living of it as we opened ourselves to deeper connections with God and one another. Our desire was for us to explore different ways of worshipping and engaging God during our worship together.

Many of us are stressed with the schedules of life which leads to finding less and less time to engage in spiritual practices and a life of faith that is nurturing.

This series was set up to take us out of that routine of what we expect in worship, not for the joy of making people uncomfortable or just to do something different but to remind us that God meets us in various ways, and sometimes it's in the unknowing, the letting go of what we have known as certain, that we are refreshed in our faith.

One of the things possibly contributing to our struggles is we have forgotten how to listen. The last thing most of us need is more talking and a lot more listening, that is why God gave us two ears and one mouth.

What we need is more space for listening, more space for quiet and reflection, to get out of our heads and allow our hearts to feel something, to be inspired by scripture, to be listening for God through prayer, to be open to new and yet ancient ways of practicing our faith, because the same routine seems to just be skimming the surface for most of us, and we need more depth if we're going to truly find rest and enjoy these lives we've been given.

We have experienced worship over the past few weeks in a variety of “different” ways that have moved us from our usual way of worship to hopefully an opportunity for each of you to experience God in a different way and finding rest and practicing sabbath.

Lectio Divina was one of the ways in which we experienced sabbath rest. It is the ancient act of slowing down and listening.

If you recall, it was a time when we quietly sat and listened to the same scripture being read three times with a different focus at each reading: listen for a phrase that stood out, a word that stood out, and what was God saying to you that day.

That may have been uncomfortable for some of you and that may only be because that was the first time you have ever had the chance to practice Lectio Divina. Hopefully, instead of being uncomfortable, it was a new way for you to experience listening in a way you have never considered before.

Jesus often went away to be alone, either early in the morning or late at night and often spent the night on a mountain or a deserted place, to get away from the hustle and bustle of his ministry, to slow down, and listen to what God had for him.

I guess we could say that if Jesus needed time to get away, to slow down, and to listen, then it should stand to reason that we too need those times.

The next Sunday we were exploring what it means to create with God. Finding Rest by noticing and recognizing all of creation and Practicing Sabbath by disconnecting from distractions and preparing the canvas (us) not for productivity but for rest and enjoyment. The goal was to shift our mind from our to-do list for the week, the worries that have piled up, what is coming next in worship, and instead allow ourselves time to connect with our creator with a mind and heart at rest.

This story of how God created all that is in existence is a good reminder to us that creation takes time. Creation was not instantaneous for God, so it won't be for us

either. And God doesn't demand that of us. If we see ourselves as the canvas, the artistic work of God, along with the rest of creation, then we are enough just as we have been created to be. There is no need to strive for productivity and results but rather we can enjoy the slower, more intentional unfolding of life that comes when we honor the need for rest and truly enjoy all that God has created.

Creating isn't about having a finished product, it's about the process of creating, connecting in very tangible ways with yourself, God, and what is around you. Creating relationship, creating love, creating hope, creating opportunity for connection. It was out of these that God created humanity. And it is because of that being created in love and hope for relationship and connection that we are invited to continue doing the same.

Week 4 we looked at how Psalm 23 offers us rest in the everyday parts of our lives. The theme for that day was Finding Rest by seeing God in the many experiences of our lives and Practicing Sabbath by acknowledging God in the people we interact with.

It's easy to miss how God might be using other people to reach us. We spend much of our time not hearing or listening to the people around us and most of our time only seeing or hearing voices that reaffirm our already held beliefs. But we know through scripture and if we think about it openly enough through our own life experiences that God uses other people to encourage us in living a more faithful life. A life that reflects our beliefs in a loving and shepherding God.

If you remember, we did a madlib that day with Psalm 23. Through the madlib we were able to form our very own personal prayer that incorporates common life events and struggles for you, as well as an offering of guidance from God, a way that someone or something meaningful in your life shows up in a shepherding way like our shepherd Jesus to guide you.

This personal prayer reminds us all how God uses others to lead us in the name of Jesus and how God meets us in the everyday events of life. Our ability to see Christ

in others allows us to be open to the things we can learn from them and the ways in which our relationships may be honoring to God.

Last week we focused on Finding Rest by trusting in God's provision, releasing the need to safeguard our survival (personal, communal, religious) as we are Practicing Sabbath by saying yes to our well-being and relationship with God by taking the time to stop.

So much of what occupies our minds and time is the need to safeguard our resources. Whether that is our home, our family, our bodies, our money. Sometimes that need to safeguard is very real because there is a legitimate threat but most of the time there is not a present threat but the fear that a threat could arise.

When the Israelites were following Moses, they were not in control and that became overwhelming. Can you relate to the Israelites? They got themselves stirred up a few times and even when God spoke clear instruction about what and how God would provide for them, they couldn't release their need to safeguard their lives.

Realistically, it happens to the best of us. But how do we stop ourselves from that same cycle showing up time and time again in a world that tells us to get ours and hold onto it for dear life?

If we are constantly moving from one thing to the next, frantic like the Israelites, worried about what is coming next and not having what is needed we will never be able to deepen our relationships with one another or with God.

And so, we come to our final week of Finding Rest and Practicing Sabbath. You might say this is the last day of notes before the final exam, that being going forth and living what we have experienced the last few weeks.

Have you ever gone to bed and thought, "I have nothing more to do. Everything is done..." Oh, that's right. You haven't. I haven't either. We live in a culture of more, more, more. It's difficult to say no and our bodies and souls pay the price.

We are maxed and overcommitted, dreaming of the next vacation where we can relax. Pastors can be the worst workaholics there are! I have been in pastoral ministry for a few years now and have had seasons of exhaustion (namely Easter and Christmas along with other “busy” Sundays) that have been overwhelming and even difficult to find joy, peace, and rest.

We are still required to work diligently for six days to meet our needs and prepare well for the Sabbath each week. This teaches us diligence, planning and priorities. God mandates a day of rest not to promote idleness, but because we need it. But more than sleep and doing nothing, the Sabbath is a day for doing something different: refocusing on God, worshipping, and fellowshiping with Christians praying, studying the Bible and meditating.

The Sabbath is a day to bond with family, appreciate the creation and do good, perhaps visiting the homebound or widows and orphans. The Sabbath should be a delight, not by doing our own hobbies, interests, and pleasures, but by honoring God and seeking to please God and do God’s will.

Learning Sabbath rest in a busy world requires trusting in a God who stands above it all, who holds all in God’s hands. We often struggle to trust God cares about our minds, bodies, and hearts not just what we produce. God invites us into this rhythm of rest because it reminds us we are more than what we accomplish.

A day of intentional rest was approved from the beginning, marked as “good” and has real power when honored. The God of the Universe teaches us to sabbath. God didn’t need to pull back on the last day of creation, but God still did because God wanted us to rest, observe, and celebrate.

The problem is we live in a culture that encourages more responsibility and more commitments; The busier you are the more important you must be! There is a gravitational pull towards acting as if we are gods ourselves, pushing past real limits and boundaries. Sabbath rest starts with acknowledging limits.

In his book, "Sabbath as Resistance", Walter Brueggemann observes *"that divine rest on the seventh day 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."*

In Sabbath, we say no to work and the addiction to answering texts and emails. We say no to the tyranny of the urgent people and situations that demand our attention.

Once you have carved the space, how do you use the time thoughtfully? Maybe we can consider three main ingredients for a meaningful Sabbath recipe are rest, delight, and contemplation.

Rest:

How tired do I feel? How can I rest my body, my mind, and my heart? Where do I feel resistance or see obstacles?

Delight:

How do I currently practice joy and delight? What are creative activities I find pleasurable, the ones that help me remember I am human and uniquely made?

Contemplate:

How am I being intentional in my relationship with God? Are there practices of gratitude for my life or longer spaces of prayer, worship, and reflection that lead to intimacy with Jesus?

Like with any great recipe, this can be adjusted to taste. Certain weeks will require more rest if you are exhausted, delight if you are drained, or worship if you long to connect with Jesus.

Friends, may we continue to find rest and practice sabbath well into the future so that we can continue to build and grow in our relationship with others and with God and may it be so.