



Sabbath



A Sermon By
The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell

June 3, 2018
The Second Sunday after Pentecost
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon may be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-06-03-AAA.mp3>.

Sabbath

The Rev. Amanda Akes-Cardwell
Grace Episcopal Church
The Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 3, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Mark 2:23-3:6

The book of Exodus is one of the first books in the Bible and is a sacred text to both Jews and Christians. It records the Ten Commandments, one of which focuses on Sabbath rest. “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For 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 livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven 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” (Ex. 20:8-11).

Of all the inherited traditions that had been given to the Hebrew people for their well-being, many of the most stringent regulations were intended to keep the Sabbath as a day free from work and commercial trade. It was a custom practiced by no other ethnic group. Since its inception, Sabbath-keeping was a significant mark of Jewish distinctiveness. By Jesus’ time, Jews had been keeping the Sabbath for hundreds of years and Sabbath regulation had become increasingly demanding.

Today’s Gospel presents us with two scenarios in which Jesus is confronted by the religious establishment regarding, in their opinion, his lack of Sabbath observance. In both situations the Pharisees represent an unbending legalism and declare Jesus’ actions unlawful; while Jesus emphasizes the human concerns of the law, which take precedence over legal precepts. Jesus did not question the sacredness of Sabbath observance or reject the inherited laws, but rather he brought a different perspective to them. When the precepts promoted human relationship with God and enhanced solidarity with community, Jesus encouraged their observance. However, when these same laws intruded on relating to God and one’s neighbor, Jesus denounced them.

We see this denouncement in today’s gospel narrative, not once, but twice. The first instance took place when Jesus’ disciples collected grain on the Sabbath. The second instance occurred when Jesus healed a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath. By traditional standards, Jesus should not have allowed either of these events to transpire. But Jesus did permit these events, not because he didn’t care about the Law, or respect tradition. Jesus healed on the Sabbath and allowed his disciples to collect grain on the Sabbath because in doing so, human well-being was enhanced enabling those humans to delve into deeper relationship with God and with one another.

That, at its core, is what Sabbath is about. Sabbath time is holy time set aside to promote wholeness and stimulate right relationship with God and neighbor. That is why God created and sanctified Sabbath time. That is why Jesus told the religious leaders that the “Sabbath was made for humankind.” The authorities were wrapped up in Sabbath logistics, in the how and when, but they had lost sight of the why. Jesus reminded them of the intent behind Sabbath rest. Sabbath time is intended to revive us and bolster us. It’s about setting aside focused time to become more whole individually and communally.

While none of us may object to this idea, I’m guessing if you’re like me, that at times you may be lax in your own Sabbath-keeping. Because, we live in a 24/7 society of consumption, a society in which we live to achieve, accomplish, perform, and possess. We want more, own more, use more, eat more, and drink more. We make idols of our to-do lists. We tell ourselves we do it all for good reasons, and in most cases we do, but do you ever feel like you just need a break? Do you ever want to hit the pause button? I’m not talking about grabbing a mojito and lying on the beach. Though that does sound

appealing and has its place. What I crave is a more life-giving and life-sustaining break. That's what Sabbath time is. Keeping the Sabbath allows us to break the restless cycle we're a part of and focus on what is truly important: God, other people, all life. God intends wholeness for us. One way to bring about that wholeness in our lives, and enjoy a more fulfilling and simpler life, is to actually honor and observe Sabbath time.

MaryAnn McKibben Dana, who is a Presbyterian pastor and mother of three, lives in the DC suburbs. She describes her family's frenetic suburban existence as a relentless list of work, errands, carpool, dishes, email, bills, and yardwork. She put it this way, "Life felt like a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle with 600 pieces."

Dana came to the conclusion that their current speed of life wasn't sustainable for her or her family. She recognized that something had to give. Her family faced a choice: to continue at the same frantic pace or to fight back with a radically different way of being. They went radical. For one year, they committed to a practice of Sabbath-keeping. For a whole day each week, they set aside their doing in order to simply be. Work took a backseat to games, walks, Legos, homebrewing, and leisurely contentment. The practice wasn't easy and it never got easier - the house was a mess, the kids still fought - but Sabbath became their one essential "to-do" each week. Dana documented her family's journey in her book, *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time*. Dana contends that, "we can act ourselves into a different way of being." Her family's experiment with holy time proves her point as they grow and change together, learning to love each other and the world more fully through spiritual practice.

Sabbath time isn't a set of rules. Nor is it time to just stare at the wall and do nothing. Nor is it a vacation. Sabbath time is holy time. It's time whose purpose is to refresh and strengthen. It's time set aside to look for God and to experience God in our lives. It's time that we have to make. It doesn't just happen. We have to intentionally carve it out of our busy lives.

Once we create the space for holy Sabbath time, there's no one way or correct way to use the time. And it doesn't have to happen on a Sunday! Sabbath can take many different forms and times. For Dana and her family, Sabbath time included play and rest. For Jesus and his disciples, the Sabbath included nourishing themselves and caring for others. What does Sabbath mean for you? What might Sabbath time look like and feel like for you? Maybe it includes worship here at Grace. What else might it include?

Our psalm today proclaims that God is acquainted with all of our ways (v2). It states that God created our inmost parts, knitting us together inside our mothers' wombs (v12). This God who created us, also created Sabbath rest, that we might make time; to return to God and rest in the knowledge that we are God's beloved. Find time. Make time. Create time. Allow yourself the freedom of being refreshed in God. God commands it. Jesus upholds it. May we find the willpower to do the same. Amen.