

Sabbath

Sign and Foretaste of the *Shalom* of God

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

– Jesus (Mark 2:27-28)

The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath. It is not an interlude but the climax of living.

– Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Sabbath is one of two ancient ordinances that God gave to his creation even before sin entered the picture. The other is marriage. Throughout Biblical history God's people have remembered him in a special way on the Sabbath. It is for this reason that we keep the Sabbath, even to this day.



Sabbath, a testimony to Creator God

Sabbath originated in Creation. We read in Genesis 2:1-3 –

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.

Because the origins of Sabbath in creation, the first way in which Sabbath shapes us as Christians is in reminding us that God is creator and that the creation which he called “very good” came from His hands. The Sabbath helps anchor us and answers the first basic question all humans have – “Where did I come from?” Sabbath reminds us that we came from the hands of a loving creator. Paul reminds us “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Sabbath, a sign of Redemption in Christ

The gospel story reminds us that during Passion Week – the final week of Jesus life leading up to his crucifixion on Friday and his resurrection on Sunday morning, that Jesus rested in the grave on the Sabbath. With the words, “It is finished,” Jesus breathed his last and purchased redemption for all humanity. In this way, Sabbath reminds us that we are not only created by God but we are also saved by God, in Christ.

Ceasing from work on Sabbath doesn't only mean physical work. It also means we cease our striving to make ourselves acceptable

to God. The rest of Sabbath signifies the rest we find in Christ when accept his perfect life as the substitute for our life of sin and brokenness.

Thus, Sabbath also answers the second basic question all people have, "What am I doing here?" Sabbath invites us to accept the truth that we are here as God's children, through Jesus.

*Sabbath, a sign of God's **Future***

But Sabbath is even more than just a reminder of God's sovereign power as my creator and my redeemer. Sabbath also points powerfully to God's future for God's creation. Notice this passage from Isaiah 66:22-23 –

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD.

Sabbath signifies the peace – shalom – that God began to bring into the world in Jesus and will finally bring to completion on day when God finally sets all wrongs right.

Discussion: How important is the practice of remembering? What happens to a society or a community that has a poor memory? How does Sabbath serve to orient us to God's future?

The Practice of Sabbath in the Postmodern World

There are three main ways that the practice of Sabbath orients the Christian's life and empowers her witness in the world:

ceasing, resisting, and engaging.

Ceasing means stopping. Modern life is so full of noise and activity that one of the most countercultural subversive practices is the practice of ceasing. rest as ceasing work on behalf of ourselves, shalom of God.

Wayne Muller says this in the opening lines of his book, *Sabbath*.

In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest.... Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something – anything – is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way (1).

When God admonishes his people in the Ten Commandments,

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

He is thinking of prescribing this rhythm of work and rest that Muller is talking about.

Engaging means that we enact God's shalom on the Sabbath, in our relationships with others and in ways that we act to bring God's healing to bear upon the pain and suffering of the world. Over and over again we find Jesus doing exactly this on the Sabbath day – teaching, walking and talking with people, and healing people. In answer those who criticized His unorthodox Sabbath practice, Jesus replied, “my Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:17).

Resisting is related to both ceasing and engaging. In other words, on Sabbath we resist the evil powers at work in the world through ceasing from certain activities (like participating in the market economy) and by engaging in certain activities (like relieving the suffering of the poor, the sick, and hurting).

Discussion: What are some things we can cease from? Engage in? In what ways do these things give both a positive witness to what God is up to in the world and also resist the powers of evil in the world?

Dwelling in Scripture – Isaiah 58

- What kind of Sabbath experience is Isaiah commending to his people in the passage?
- What contrasts do you find?
- What kind of Sabbath practices does Isaiah call for?
- How does this compare to the practice of Sabbath you are familiar with?

Faith in Action

Sabbath invites us into God's reality – God's Shalom – that he is even now bringing to bear upon the world. As we enter that reality we have our lives oriented to a new way of being human. For example, Sabbath invites us to consider that the economic rationality of our world is not the only rationality, that people are not only objects, and that the Earth is not only 'natural resources' to be used up in pursuit of wealth. Rather, God's creation is full of wonder and awe and Sabbath invites us to stand in awe. So, on Sabbath we lay down our identity as consumers and we step into a different story – a story that says we are creatures, loving created by a loving God that longs to be in relationship with us.

This week, as you enter into Sabbath as the sun is setting on Friday night, imagine how you can demonstrate this 'God-reality' in your actual practice of life. How would you live differently? What things would you cease? What things would you engage in intentionally? What would you affirm and what would you resist?

Praying to Understand

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one,
 for yours is the kingdom and the power
 and the glory forever. Amen.

– Matthew 6:9-13, TNIV

Don't struggle with this prayer. Just pray it and allow its words to become yours.

Homework

- Go to the blog (www.newwaytobehuman.org) and comment on the post there, which ends with the question, "If we were to take these ideas seriously, as a congregation, what would we have to do differently?"

Questions, problems, challenges, insights, discoveries