

Celebrating Sabbath Time: Overcoming our fears of scarcity
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Purpose: To inspire the congregation to move beyond fear of scarcity to embrace the gift of Sabbath time as a declaration of our trust and faith in our God who created, liberated, and redeemed us.

Last week Pastor Neil reintroduced us to the topic of Sabbath time. Next week Pastor Velma will prompt us to consider ways we can concretely create Sabbath time by incorporating

Sabbath as connected with...

- *The creation story
- *The creating and sustaining of God's liberated people
- *Structure for God's people to live into abundant life with Yahweh as their only God

more things which bring us utter delight. This morning we will spend time looking at three Old Testament understandings of Sabbath. Specifically looking at Sabbath as connected with the creation story, Sabbath as connected with the creation and sustaining of God's liberated people, and finally Sabbath as connected with

structure for God's people to live into abundant life with Yahweh as their only God.

As we look at different Old Testament passages we will see that there is a commonality that connects them all, a framework that under grids them and holds them all together. That theme is the understandings is that Sabbath is a gift from God so that we may be reminded that there is a God who has created us, liberated us, and redeemed us. And, we are not that God.

Therefore the texts will reveal that embracing Sabbath time is an exercise of allowing God to keep us rooted in this transforming truth and allowing God to reorient us again and again to this transforming reality. There is a God who has created us, liberated us, and redeemed us. And, we are not that God.

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Now before we get into some Old Testament passages, I would like to offer a hypothesis I have on this important subject of Sabbath. Particularly I would like to share my hypothesis for

why I think we fail to embrace Sabbath time. I will look forward to hearing from you after the sermon if you agree or disagree with my hypothesis, and if this sermon alters your initial response. My hypothesis is this: One of the central reasons we fail to embrace the gift of Sabbath time is because of our fears of scarcity. Furthermore we have difficulty with even naming our fears of scarcity.

Cindy's Hypothesis:

One of the central reasons we fail to embrace the gift of Sabbath time is because of our fears of scarcity.

How would I elaborate on this hypothesis? Thanks for asking. 😊

Well first is just looking at this word scarcity. Scarcity is defined as “an insufficient supply of something.” So we fail to embrace the gift of Sabbath time because of our fears of an insufficient supply of something. Now, if you want to change the word scarcity, here are some synonymous you could pick

One of the central reasons we fail to embrace the gift of Sabbath time is because of our fears of **shortage, lack, dearth, insufficiency, scarceness, inadequacy.**

from - shortage, lack, dearth, insufficiency, scarceness, inadequacy. On the opposite side, an antonym of scarcity would be: abundance. Embracing Sabbath time, and all the dimensions of it, means that we overcome our fears of scarcity, our fears of inadequacy, our fears that there is not or will not be enough, fears that we are not enough.

One of the central reasons we fail to embrace the gift of Sabbath time is because of our fears **that there is not or will not be enough, that we are not enough.**

Brené Brown has done extensive research on shame and fear, particularly our fear that we are not enough in some capacity. In her recent book “The Gifts of Imperfection” she talks about things we need to release before we can practice wholehearted living. In this book she quotes Lynne Twist. Twist writes this along this theme of scarcity:

For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn’t get enough sleep.” The next one is “I don’t have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of *not enough* occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend

most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of... We don't have enough exercise. We don't have enough work. We don't have enough profits. We don't have enough power. We don't have enough wilderness. We don't have enough weekends. Of course, we don't have enough money – ever.

We're not thin enough, we're not smart enough, we're not pretty enough or fit enough or educated or successful enough, or rich enough – ever. Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night our minds race with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to the reverie of lack... What begins as a simple expression of the hurried life, or even the challenged life, grows into the great justification for an unfulfilled life... We each have the choice in any setting to step back and let go of the mind-set of scarcity. Once we let go of scarcity, we discover the surprising truth of sufficiency. By sufficiency, I don't mean a quantity of anything. Sufficiency isn't two steps up from poverty or one step short of abundance. It isn't a measure of barely enough or more than enough. Sufficiency isn't an amount at all. It is an experience, a context we generate, a declaration, a knowing that there is enough, and that we are enough" (Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, 83).

We live in an age when those around us try to convince us that our identity and worth is synonymous with or measured by what we do and how much we are able to produce. Therefore we fear stopping, slowing time, embracing the delights of this life because we have fears of scarcity. In the midst of our fears, which I will argue have been present since the dawn of humanity, God gifts us with Sabbath time and we are allowed to be transformed by this foundational truth. There is a God who created us, liberated us, and redeemed us. And, we are not that God. As we live in to Sabbath time, and rest and delight in the true God we will hear whispers deep in our soul that we are worthy, we are loved, we are enough.

Hold on to my hypothesis as we move now to looking at these three understandings of Sabbath in the Hebrew scripture and how these scriptures inform our understanding of Sabbath and ways we can overcome our fears of scarcity. We begin by going to the beginning as we first

look at Sabbath as connected with the creation story. Here in Genesis chapter two we read, “²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

Within this familiar narrative we see an act of a loving God. We read of our God who created all things, and of our God who blessed rest, and blessed stopping from creating to moving to enjoy what has been created. Eugene Roop points out that “The creation drama does not flow on in ceaseless activity. Creation moves toward rest. This “rest” is not the rest of one who is exhausted, although that may be included. Creation rest describes the rest of one who is satisfied, one who looks at the world saying, *Behold, it is very good...* Never ceasing, never satisfied, never finding time for any creature would not (*does*) characterize a loving God” (Eugene Roop, *Believers Church Bible Commentary*, 32). In God’s decision to rest we are challenged that if the God of all, the God who created all things, makes time to enjoy and to delight, should not then we, God’s creation, also stop and embrace Sabbath, embrace time to delight and join with God in saying “behold, it is very good?” Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann offers that “The celebration of a day of rest was, then, the announcement of trust in this God who is confident enough to rest. It was then and is now an assertion that life does not depend upon our feverish activity of self-securing (right, feverish self-securing due to our fears of scarcity), but that there can be a pause in which life is given to us simply as a gift” (Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Genesis*, 35). There is a God who created us, and we are not that God. Next week Pastor Velma will spend more time talking about how Sabbath is connected with the story of creation.

Sabbath as connected with the creating and sustaining of God's liberated people.

Exodus 16 – Manna and Quail

The second Old Testament understanding of Sabbath is what I have named Sabbath as connected with the creation and sustaining of God's liberated people. For this angle we turn to Exodus chapter 16, of which a portion was read just prior to the sermon. In this text we find the Israelite community in the

wilderness. Just two chapters prior we read of the account at the Red Sea and the Exodus experience. Chapter fifteen is filled with songs of Moses and Miriam, praising and worshiping God as the one who delivered God's people out of slavery and oppression. At the end of chapter fifteen the people grumbled against Moses because they were thirsty, and God provided sweet water to drink.

Now in chapter sixteen the community is grumbling again and their time away after the Egypt has been long enough that they are glossing over the oppression and slavery and imagining that life back there would have to be better than being out in the wilderness and hungry. It struck me this week that God went to great lengths to free them from one form of slavery only for them to quickly succumb to the next form of slavery – their fears of scarcity. Moreover it struck me that God went to great lengths to free them from one form of oppression only for them to not be able to properly recognize the one and the power of the one who brought that liberation.

God hears their cries and shares with Moses in verse 4, "Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know

that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt (liberating!), and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord (sustaining!).” The text goes on to share how this happened just as God said it would. Quail came at night and manna in the morning.

I can almost picture the Israelites waking up in the morning and wondering and then fearing if there will be manna again today, or if today God will have forgotten, or if today God would have given up on them. I believe that the Israelites had true fears of scarcity. What if tomorrow God forgets? What if there is not enough manna? And so they try to save extra today just in case there is not enough later. Their fears propelled and compelled them to do more than God told them they needed to do. Their fears made them unable to hear God’s promises as their fears were shouting deep within them... what if there is not enough?

Sabbath as connected with the creating and sustaining of God’s liberated people reminds us that our mighty God is a God in the business of setting the captives free, including from the fears that hold them in bondage. Moreover in the story of the Exodus we see how God took a group of people without status, without ownership, and made them into a group of people. God gave them a name, a purpose, and said you are worthy not because of anything you have done, but because of what I have done. I choose to believe that God knew the temptation they would face to succumb to other masters, and therefore God created rhythms to remind them that there is a God who created and liberated them, and they are not that God.

I wonder what would be our manna today? What are those things that we so deeply fear will suddenly vanish tomorrow morning, so therefore we try to clutch them close to us in the hopes that we can prevent them from vanishing? What are those things that we do that communicates to our loved ones we fear that we are not enough? Is it working too many hours? Pushing ourselves to exhaustion simply because our to-do list is not finished yet? Is it being

unable to say enough is enough? Is it not being able to stop, breathe, and delight in what God has already created? Is it striving for perfectionism for fear that those around us will see that we are not enough, that we are lacking, that we are inadequate in some way? Is it only being able to listen to the voice within that says you should be doing this or that, don't stop yet, don't embrace delight, you must do this or that first? Is it not being able to laugh, to cry, to sing, to relax, to live into the truth that in Christ we are enough because we are created, we are liberated, we are loved? It is God who brought us out of the land of slavery and it is God who has released us to live as free people.

Sabbath as connected with structure for God's people to live into abundant life with Yahweh as their only God.

Exodus 20:1-11; 31:12-18

Finally the third Old Testament understanding of Sabbath is Sabbath as connected with structure for God's people to live into abundant life with Yahweh as their only God. For this understanding we begin by turning to Exodus chapter 20 where we find the 10 Commandments. Again, the Israelites continue to

be in the wilderness and Moses goes up on the mountain to meet with the Lord. Here is a list of the first four commandments. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not worship idols. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Commandments:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not worship idols.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

I would argue that the first four commandments all speak directly to our relationship with God, and that in a way observing the Sabbath is a culmination of the first three commandments. Again, I believe that God was aware of human tendencies and of our difficulty of keeping perspective on who we think we should be and who God has called us to be. This is evident in Exodus chapter 31 verse sixteen which was read prior to the sermon. Here we read God's

additional explanations on the Sabbath commandment. The Lord said, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.” This image of covenant evokes memories of the previous covenants in the Old Testaments and strengthens our longings to live into the new covenant made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The language speaks of a relationship in which we know and understand and make choices to reflect our trust in the amazing reality that there is a God who created us, liberated us, and redeemed us. And, that we know that we are not that God. Therefore in agreement with the covenant we will heed the commandment and joyfully embrace the gift Sabbath time, of listening to the voice that matters that says there is enough, we are enough.

I would argue that Sabbath time is very counter cultural for us. Most of the voices outside of us and many of the voice inside of us will tell us that there is always more to do doing and creating, and that our worth and value is wrapped up in what we can show that we have produced or accomplished. As we listen to these voices if we decide they speak elements of truth, and we trust that they are correct, then these voices will help to generate feelings of being guilty and afraid when we consider having Sabbath time. These voices feed our fears of scarcity.

I wonder how you and I would be different; I wonder how this congregation would be different; I wonder how the world would be different – if all of God’s people’s took one day a week did not worry about a to-do list but embraced that which delights God, or that which God created us to find delight in? Perhaps that feels too overwhelming so I wonder if we could take a baby step? My challenge this week for you and for me is that we each take fifteen minutes every morning or evening (or if you want to be bold do it both times!)- not to rehearse the familiar litany of not enough sleep, not enough time, not enough accomplished – but to stop, breathe, laugh, rejoice, pray, to proclaim there is a God who created us. There is a God who liberated us.

There is a God who redeemed us. And hallelujah I am not that God! And praise to the living God I don't have to pretend to myself or anyone else that I think I am that God.

This morning it is my prayer that we all might become more open to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives. As we set aside Sabbath time may we continue to be formed in the image of Jesus. May our Sabbath time transform our vision, so that we might see all of God's creation as just that, God's creation. I trust that as God looks at you and me and at the entire created world, God declares with delight, "Behold, it is very good. It is enough. You, my child, are enough."

May it be so. Amen.