

¹²“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but 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 male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Rest

Last Easter, we planned on leaving for Oregon after Sunday worship. We selected a route, a location to stop, and even when we would stop. Everything was planned and prepped in advance but amidst barking orders to get ready, we're going, I took a nap. Wait? What? Didn't you have things to do, bags to pack, chickens to feed, a garden to water all before leaving? Weren't you just running around barking orders... and now a nap? Yeah. The children may not have understood but there was a rhyme and reason for putting rest as a priority. It's a good idea to sleep before big decisions, before getting to work. Sometimes the best thing to do is sleep on it, take a nap, wake up refreshed, relaxed... rested. The church year almost feels the same way. We've come out of the festival season. We are moving from the Life of Christ to the Life of the church. We're finally back to green symbolizing the growth of the church. We've received our marching orders, the command, the destination, "*Make disciples of all nations baptizing them,*" in the name of our Triune God (last week). We know exactly what it is we are to do. We know who we are to proclaim. We know what he has done for us. Our shoes are on, we're at the door, ready to go – and then it's time for a nap. Maybe the lectionary has got something wrong? Observe the Sabbath? Don't we have better things to do?

The most important part of Christianity, the thing that the Father wants the most from us is to receive the gifts he gives, to rest in God's accomplished work for us. But we're not so good at resting. We're so busy trying to control life. We have so much to do. We're experts in finding more to do. But the results of not resting lead to burnout, anxiety, stress, depression. That's why rest is so important. Rest is essential to life. Resting clears the fog, allows us to make thoughtful decisions. It allows us to think properly. That's why a nap is important before heading out on a 10 hour drive because I'd rather sleep on the couch than in the car. In a similar fashion God wants us to rest in his house regularly rather than find exhaustion along the way and end up in the ditch of despair or self-confidence. Rest.

But Israel is pretty much arriving in the Promised Land. It's the end of a trip, yet another good time to take a nap. They've just journeyed for forty years. I'm pretty sure they would have wanted to rest and enjoy what God has given them. But God didn't want them to forget who the giver of the gifts

was. He wanted them to set aside a day to recall his work. *12 “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work,* This is a wonderful Word from God. Rest for everyone... even the animals need a break.

That doesn't mean do nothing at all. *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.* Observe does not mean think about from time to time or view from a distance afar. It means to exercise great care. God knew that all of the work to be done building a nation they would be tempted to go without a nap. God also knew that people are great at taking his gifts and turning them into work. Taking a gift God has given for blessing into an obligation that has to be met. Jesus uses the Pharisees as such an example. They didn't observe the Sabbath. Instead of keeping their focus on God's work for them, they looked to what they could or couldn't do for God.

But the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Pharisees became enslaved again to work, set aside the rest they so desperately needed and worried about how many steps they could take, whether or not they could have a snack on the side of the road. Rather than being gift givers of God, pointing people to the blessings from God – they became rule enforcers. They saw the Sabbath as something they must do for God, turning God into a petty and shallow monster that must be worshipped once a week or he gets jealous. That's not what the Sabbath is for. That's more work. More slavery. More of what they already had under Egypt. Rest!

But we're not so good at stopping are we? We're not so good at slowing down and resting. Even vacations are so packed that we need a vacation from vacation to actually rest. As students and workers set out for summer break we're already busy filling up the schedule with Conventions, Jury Duty, VBS, Summerfest, Bible Camp. Then there is time to work. We work so hard, and play so hard that when Sunday rolls around, “I just have to take some time for me.” I just don't have time. I know you are busy. I know that you can't always make it to church on Sunday. I realize that you have other obligations in life. The sad fact is that the sinful nature loves money and things more than the truth of scripture. We strive for success. We burn the candle at both ends. We claim, “We don't have enough time.”

What we're really saying to God is, “I'm too busy. I'm too important to stop and take a break. I don't trust you to provide for me.” Either that or like me, You're too lazy to do the work until last minute and then have to work double time to finish when needed... We're so busy trying to stay in control, prove we are in control, and be Lord over our life, the little god in control of all things but when life doesn't go as expected, when problems creep in - we suddenly realize we aren't even in control of the little world which we create. We aren't in control of anything and who gets blamed for our burnout? God.

Then, when we recognize our sin rather than remember God's rest he won for us. When we hit the rumble strip on the side of the road we redouble our efforts, strive with everything we have not to make up for the God we've let down. Worship becomes an obligation something to get through rather than a reminder of God's Work and God's rest he won for us. That leads us away from rest, away from the church and exhaustion ends up in a ditch on the side of the road which misses out on the greater blessing that God has won for us.

Worship begins when we stop trying to do it all and rest. Rest by receiving what Christ has one for you. Our Father's greatest love is to give. He wants us to receive his blessings, to rest in his work.

He reminds Israel. *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.* The Sabbath was all about the blessings God intended to give them. Even in the law God reveals himself as the God for us. God meets us with great blessing.

He gave his people rest. For 430 years they were stuck in Egypt building cities. They were slaves in Egypt baking bricks and when Moses asks for some time to rest, worship the Lord and then return, they are forced to make more bricks and gather their own straw. They didn't know what freedom was. All they knew was work. They were set free. Deuteronomy makes it clear that it wasn't because they were great people but because of his grace and mercy. He brought them out *with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.* It didn't mean doing any work but resting in his works.

In the same way, Jesus, came in the flesh to fulfill the law and to become our Sabbath rest. That was the same reason Jesus came into this world, to provide rest for all people, to restore the original intent of the Sabbath. That doesn't mean we are bound by Sabbath laws. That means forgiveness is complete. There isn't anything left to do to atone for sin.

But Paul warns that people will come along and try to take this rest away from you, *"In later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars... they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth (1 Timothy 4:1,3)* Every day is a day of rest.

If the children of Israel had reason to come together and hear of the mighty acts of God, how much more reason so we? Every Sunday and even during the week we are able to hear of Christ, the Savior from slavery to sin and death, the one who set us free. Here in Word and Sacrament we see proclaimed the Word which provides rest for the exhausted. And in hearing the effective word of the gospel, God preserves us in this life and will raise us up on the last day.

It does not rest on us or who we are. This is the greatest difference between us and Catholicism, the reformed, and any other religion. For them, there is always more work to do, more prayer groups, more studies if you are going to be a missional, authentic, true, born again Christian. Instead of a solution they offer more uncertainty more slavery. But we are certain of this and this is what we believe. We are forgiven and can rest securely in Christ alone.

You aren't God and that's a good thing. The universe doesn't depend on you and neither does your salvation. So continue to hear about his work, his love, his care, receive his gifts with thanksgiving and praise. Recall his work and then when it's all said and done, take a nap. Yes there is a lot of work to do but God doesn't want you to fall asleep on the way. He wants you to make it home. Rest before long car trips. Rests in Christ alone, not on what we can achieve while we wait for Jesus' return. And then refreshed go and share the same rest with others. The rest of a God who wants for nothing more than we receive what he has already won for us. Amen.