

March 14, 2020 WholeLife Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2800 N Orange Ave Orlando, FL 32804
 Mark 6:30-31 About Sabbath... what does it really mean to rest? By Andy McDonald

Over the past few weeks here in our country and for longer in other places our world has become a place of fear and frustration. The growing spread of the Coronavirus has shut down our regular world.

There is a certain level of helplessness we feel. We have been trained and we have practiced a health and medicine consumerism that now betrays us. We watch the evening news and the commercials in between the news continually educate us that the answer to almost any health crisis is a prescription to some cool named drug.

And so when this crisis creeps our way we are very unprepared for some enemy to our health we can't detect. We fear contact with each other because, since before any symptoms become evident we can be sharing it with each other without knowing. And at least at first, there's no miracle pill for us to take to prevent or cure this virus.

We feel inept and incompetent when all we can do is hibernate, and wash our hands, not touch our faces, and disinfect everything we touch.

Parents who are themselves exhausted and frightened by this virus now have the added challenge of children home from school rooms and adding tutor and academic coach to other parental responsibilities.

For those with essential jobs not only is all this reality but also there is the demand to return to the work place and "carry on".

Phillip Burks sent me an article from Psychology Today by Rosemary Sword and Phillip Zimbardo. According to them people affected by natural disasters or an event like this pandemic will experience grief and go through similar stages as the regular grieving process.

Even before the pandemic takes the life of someone we know or love, even if that doesn't become our reality, we begin to suffer loss. Already we are suffering the loss of the life we know. Church, assembling as the Body of Christ, for worship and fellowship and shared learning has been lost. Seeing our friends and work mates. Going to the office. Grabbing lunch together. Going out in the evening. Going to class. Going to the gym. Going shopping for something other than groceries. Going out to eat. Going out to eat. Going, going, going our relentless ability to distract ourselves by changing our settings has been lost for a period of time. We are supposed to, like in a hurricane, "shelter in place."

There's this unseen unknown not easily identifiable enemy lurking and we miss the reality or illusion of safety in which we normally live, we feel that loss.

And we may find ourselves moving through Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross' stages of grief. At first we may deny the reality. This can't be. If it is it can't be as bad as they say. If it is as bad as they say it can't be that bad here.

And to cope we can go on and on with our denials of our loss.

Next we might get mad or angry. Why me? Why us? This is so unfair? What did we do to deserve this? Who can I blame? We see this sometimes reflected in the news as we collectively grasp to make sense we are unhappy or angry and we look for scape goats.

We may move to bargaining with ourselves or with the virus. If I do this maybe this won't happen. How can I negotiate this not to happen? How can I control this? If I stay home and wash my hands and disinfect sufficiently I'll avoid this.

Expect some eventual depression. We've lost life as we know it. Too late. I felt alone before now everyone's alone. I felt socially quarantined before and now it's mandated. And there can be a depressive sense of hopelessness that creeps into our lives.

Eventually, if we don't get stuck, there can come an acceptance of the reality we face. As said in the movie Babe when facing the duck having been eaten, "It is what it is!" Things have changed but I can cope. I can begin to rebuild. Maybe as a result of sheltering in place I can know some neighbors better over the fence. I can start a new afresh. I can make plans to be in better health prepared for future challenges, etc. etc.

One of the unique realities is that during this "shelter in place" time it may mean that if we come to it with intention we can find our Sabbaths a real time of rest, almost forced rest. But the reality is that even with our normal practices blocked we still have the freedom to enter or not to enter God's rest for us.

Each week as the sunsets on Friday. As the sky turns into an amazing or not so amazing sunset. As the crickets come alive in song. As we watch the evening arrive and hear the coming night sounds begin. The little screech owl in our neighborhood begins its evening call. As we watch the sky darken on Friday each week and see the first stars the Sabbath comes to us in time and invites us to rest.

What does it mean to rest? Right now for you and me, what does it mean to rest? And in our more regular in whatever will be our new normal what will it mean to rest?

If we turn to the great theological resource of Webster's Dictionary we find these definitions:

1: REPOSE, SLEEP *specifically* : a bodily state characterized by minimal functional and metabolic activities

2a: freedom from activity or labor **b:** a state of motionlessness or inactivity **c:** the repose of death

3: a place for resting or lodging **4:** peace of mind or spirit

5a(1): a rhythmic silence in music **(2):** a character representing such a silence **b:** a brief pause in reading

6: something used for support

As I pointed out earlier in this series, the music of life is 6 beats of work and life and noise and accomplishment and achievement followed by 1/7th rhythmic silence, stillness, quietness.

Those who train hard for some athletic purpose know the risk of over training. Going at the goal all in for all the available time won't get the same results as a rhythm of hard training followed by rest.

Genesis delivers us a creation pattern of God creating, and like an artist stepping back from a day of painting to study the canvas and seeing what has been created declaring it good. This happens each day.

At the climax of that week God doesn't declare Sabbath, the ceasing of creating, the resting "good," but he establishes it, he blesses, he changes the quality of those 24 hours, and makes them holy time. Later he will call the nation he is forming to "Remember the Sabbath." He will establish in the coming of manna this pattern for 40 years in the wilderness of daily delivery of manna with a ceasing on Sabbath.

What is the rest we need? Is it just a physical thing, like a runner who trains hard and needs a rest? Is it more of psychological interlude a chance to process? Is it more of vacation rest from our occupation? Is it more of a rest from a self-absorbed life to shared life? Or are we complicating it beyond need?

I like the concept expressed by Barbara Brown Taylor: "I have made a practice of saying no for one whole day a week: to work, to commerce, to the Internet, to the car, to the voice in my head that is forever whispering, "More." One day each week, More God is the only thing on my list. She wisely doesn't turn this into a "resting rule" to impose on others it is simply her practice. If we equate resting with ceasing how does that affect your historical practice of Sabbath and how might it affect our practice of Sabbath going forward?"

I don't know about you but I've always been plagued with the frustration of opportunity cost. You know in economics it's that rule that if we make one investment then our money is now not available to make any other investment. But it isn't just an economic principle.

If I say yes to an appointment, a phone call, an evening with family, a day alone for thinking, etc. However I choose to invest my time it means that I am simultaneously deciding to not invest it in every other option. We attempt to fool opportunity cost by multi-tasking thinking we can beat it!

To cease, to rest, to stop our pushing forward, to push pause on our lives feels, at times, like a very expensive opportunity cost.

Our vision as a church feels very un-Sabbath like. It opens us to unceasing doing rather than being. We seek to be "A church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community." It is church 24/7 and while this is true we the church still need a Sabbath.

When I was growing up in our denomination it was the custom to spend part of the Sabbath day passing out literature, maybe better identified as distributing literature, collateral about our beliefs, truth as we understood it, or invitations to some church meetings/lectures.

I know many churches cram the Sabbath with meetings, events, trainings, missionary endeavors, workshops. The whole day is spent at church from early morning until vespers to bid farewell to Sabbath. Some seek for their members to "rest" or "cease" from one activity to engage in a different one to the point of exhaustion.

Taylor again writes: "I know that saying no is a more difficult spiritual practice than tithing, praying on a cold stone floor, or visiting a prisoner on death row—because while all of those worthy activities may involve saying no to something else so that I can do them instead, they still amount to doing more instead of less. Limiting my activity does not help me feel holy. Doing more feels holy, which is why I stay so intrigued by the fourth commandment."

God calls us to a day of doing less and being more. A day of rest. It is fascinating that every seventh year God invited the young nation of Israel to take a whole year of rest and let the land have a rest. Right now with the shuttering of so much of the commerce of our world, forced by the virus into giving so many workers an unsought and undesired rest, imagine if we planned to sort of shut down for a whole year every 7 years. And then after 7 sabbatical years there was to be the year of Jubilee when slaves go free and property returns to the original family ownership.

History reveals these sabbatical years and a year of Jubilee weren't practiced well. But even considering it they made rules to circumvent God's plan building economic models that took into account the year of Jubilee so investors wouldn't lose.

There have been times in our history, even here in America, when government has poked its nose into Sabbath keeping and legislated observance of a Sunday Sabbath. For years freight trains were not allowed to haul freight through Georgia on Sunday. Still today many place won't sell certain items on Sunday.

But Sabbath, whether on the true Sabbath day of Saturday or on Sunday observed as Sabbath by many Christians, just doesn't work by force. For optimum benefit it must be my choice to cease. In fact it was Karl Barth, the great Swiss theologian who wrote: "A being is free only when it can determine and limit its activity."

Our resistance to rest is rooted in our forgetfulness that we are creatures. God made and then rested and since the fall our striving our delusional thinking and pursuit is to be gods rather than find comfort and rest in our being creatures.

Prior to creation God had already dealt with Lucifer who wished to be God, to usurp his position and authority, to make himself like the most high. So in his infinite wisdom at the conclusion of his creation God gave us Sabbath.

It's original intent was to teach us to rest from any misunderstanding. God is the creator and we are the creature.

Too often all week we rush around attempting to order the world and create and sometimes we do it so successfully that it is hard to remember our creatureliness.

Sabbath calls us to rest from trying to prove our worth and rest in the reality that our God values us beyond our comprehension and all our striving and all our rushing forward Sunday – Friday will not increase our value to him. He already values us as his creation and invites us to rest.

The Sabbath is meant to remind us that we are worth more than what we can produce. "Sabbath invites us to rest," writes Wendell Berry. "It asks us to notice that while we rest the world continues without our help. It invites us to find delight in the world's beauty and abundance."

Sabbath is not simply rest, but a revolutionary act in which we begin to live into a new social reality. When the bank president and the unemployed new immigrant are both sitting on blankets in the park with their families the stratifications we so easily make Sun-Fri are not evident. When extremely rich and extremely poor grandparents are feeding ducks with their grandchildren on Sabbath those identifiers that might separate are no longer distinguishable.

Walter Brueggemann writes, "Sabbath...is an occasion for reimagining all of social life away from coercion and competition to compassionate solidarity. Such solidarity is imaginable and capable of performance only when the drivenness of acquisitiveness is broken.... Sabbath is an invitation to receptivity, an acknowledgement that what is needed is given and need not be seized."

Rest. Rest in the calm assurance that your worth, your value has been established originally by your creator and then again by your divine savior.

Rest. Rest knowing that not the labors of your hands, no matter how efficient or gifted or diligent, can fulfill the law's demands that fulfillment is a gift from Jesus.

Rest. Rest in the calm assurance that all of creation preceded you and can manage to continue sustained by the creator without you.

So rest. Eugene Peterson translates Jesus words this way. "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. (I think those unforced rhythms of grace include 6 beats of work and 1 of rest) Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Embrace Sabbath because that's the rest we are meant to have rest in God, trusting our creator to care for us and save us, so we can rest, living freely and lightly.



When was a time you had a true Sabbath rest?

Why do you think God initiated Sabbath before anyone was tired?

How can we help people not think of Sabbath as “Jewish” since it started long before Judaism began ?

Since Sabbath was established prior to sin what do imagine was God’s original intent for Sabbath?

Last night at sundown until tonight at sundown is the “National Day of Unplugging. How have our personal electronics made it harder or easier, more or less important to Sabbath?

How would you explain why Sabbath is important for you to make a part of your weekly life?

What does it mean to you when we are asked to remember it and to keep it holy? How?

What are all the things Sabbath is for doing as opposed to not doing?

What is your plan to make your Sabbath more intentional?

How is Sabbath more relational than behavioral?



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