

6.3.18

Sabbath Rhythm

Deuteronomy 5:12–15

Mark 2:23–3:6

It is the beginning of summer, and last weekend was the long Memorial Day weekend. Folks have vacations on their minds. Rest, rejuvenation, and renewal—all words associated with vacation. Also words connected with Sabbath. Sabbath rest is more than a nap (although a good Sunday afternoon nap is high on my priority list). Sabbath rest is life-giving. God rests at the end of creation so creation can continue. The Sabbath is created for new life, new energy, new vision, and ongoing creation. God rests for the sake of life.

For the most part, contemporary Christians pay little attention to the Sabbath. What is your experience with practicing Sabbath? When I was young, up through elementary school, my dad always said Sunday was family day. We could not play with friends or go over to their houses. We went to church, had a family meal, and did a family activity together or went to youth group in the evening. We were not as strict as the Puritans who would not play cards or watch TV. Do you remember “Blue Laws”? I do not remember them in California, but I can remember even in high school stores being closed on Sunday in Houston, TX.

Because most of these memories were a series of what we could not do, there was not much potential for seeing the Sabbath in a positive way. It was hard to see Sabbath as life-giving or a statement of taking time to reflect and give thanks for the blessings of the week.

In recent years Sabbath rest has gained some attention as a way of finding rest, renewal, and delight in our busy lives. It is being seen as a positive practice of faith. Why do we practice the Sabbath rhythm, the Sabbath discipline?

Not for a break. Not for some timeout or time off. Not just to recoup (all of which is good). Sabbath rest is essential because it anticipates action for the sake of life. It means getting back in there and figuring out where life needs to happen—and that requires some significant Sabbath rest.

We keep the Sabbath to look around and ask who needs rest. Who needs life? It is hard work to always be looking to see whose lives need restoration and healing and wholeness and to do something about it.

The story begins with Jesus’ disciples literally making “a way” through fields. They are not stealing grain as they journey. To the Pharisees, this behavior appears to deliberately neglect the mandate to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. Jesus disagrees, not because he regards the Sabbath commandments as trivial but because he sees a larger picture.

As a rabbi and reformer, Jesus is especially concerned with how religious life is too often distorted and abused. Religious practices are not ends in themselves or standards people must follow in order to be righteous. Jesus says the whole point of practices like Sabbath keeping is to help life to flourish in healthy ways. Religious observance is valuable precisely to the extent that it helps life to thrive; and it is destructive precisely to the extent that it doesn’t.

Weekly Sabbath keeping participates in the grand rhythm of life begun at creation and all for the sake of personal health, familial health, societal health, and the health of all creation. Are we oriented in all we do: our worship and our service, our prayers and our proclamations—toward the vibrant health of the faith community and the world?

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

*Bob*