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R & R

Scripture: *Exodus 16:21-30*

I cannot believe it is Labor Day weekend. The summer has flown by. Hopefully you have all had an opportunity for some R&R. Sometimes we get the idea that R&R only takes place on a beach in the Bahamas or on a mountain top in the Alps. But the reality is that God gave us an opportunity for more than just Rest and Relaxation but an opportunity for rest in the presence of God and restoration, recreation of our own spirit. For on the seventh day, God rested and calls us to do the same. In the Jewish tradition, Sabbath is called Shabbat. Each week for 24 hours the faithful Jew observes Shabbat, Sabbath. Hear these words from author Nan Fink in her memoir entitled *Stranger in the Midst*: “On Friday afternoon, at the very last minute, we’d rush home, stopping at the grocery to pick up supplies. Flying into the kitchen we’d cook ahead for the next twenty-four hours. Sometimes, I’d think how strange it was to be in such a frenzy to get ready for a day of rest. When I joined Michael and his son for the lighting of the candles, the whole house seemed transformed. Papers and books were neatly piled, flowers stood in a vase on the table, and the golden light of the setting sun filled the room. Shabbat is like nothing else. Time as we know it does not exist for these twenty-four hours, and the worries of the week soon fall away. A feeling of joy appears...and the heart opens. Shabbat is a meditation of unbelievable beauty.”

Today is God’s gift of Sabbath. We light the candles this morning as part of an ancient tradition of Sabbath. May we find in this celebration the love of God and gratitude for life. For we need not travel to distant places to find our rest in God. We find it here in the holiness of the Sabbath.

Sabbath or Shabbat as it is known in Judaism is the center of the Jewish faith. Shabbat is the axis around which the Jewish life revolves. It is the centerpiece of the week. The faithful Jew sees the week as always moving toward Shabbat. The word itself means to stop. Sabbath is a time to stop the mind from racing, to stop the frantic busyness of our daily routine, to stop the worry that so often occupies us. To stop plotting and planning and striving. This morning we stop, relax and find our refreshment in God’s unconditional love for us.

Prayer

Moses was wandering the desert with the Israelites. They had secured their freedom from the Egyptians and were now moving toward the Promise Land. This journey would last for 40 years. The journey was filled with challenges and much of the time the people were just trying to stay alive. They had no map, and little in the way of supplies. It is an amazing story we find in Exodus. In the midst of this journey, God demands of Moses to “Remember the Sabbath. To keep it holy.” To stop the daily routine, to cease work and to rest in the presence of God. Ceasing, stopping action is certainly counter to the culture in which we live. But it is not counter

to just our culture. Listen to the words of Exodus that follow right after the passage Kevin read earlier. *Exodus 16:27 – 30*

Nevertheless...

God commanded, Moses shared the message, but the people knew better. They had enough food to sustain them. The manna was already given. God had provided, but the people just could not rest. They went looking for the manna that they did not even need. Humanity, will we ever learn?

We are not much different from the Israelites. We have plenty. Our lives are full to overflowing. We rise early in the morning and race through the day, through the month, through the seasons. We are a busy people. We are constantly in a hurry. We are like the squirrels preparing for fall. We acquire day and night, night and day, never to truly rest. We have “to do” lists that are never ending. We mark off two items and add three. Our hearts race, our blood pressure rises, we are sleep deprived and the concept of rest actually frightens us.

I don’t know about you, but I have actually taken vacations that I needed a vacation from when I returned home. When we ski, we are often the first on the mountain and the last off, only to be the first on the mountain the next day.

“Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” We Christians could reach back toward our Jewish roots and remember why the Sabbath is holy and how we might live as God’s people of the Shabbat, Sabbath.

In his book, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, teacher, preacher and author, John Ortberg writes: “Devote a specific day to acts of celebrations so that eventually joy will infuse your entire life. One day a week eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that stretches and challenges you, read books that refresh your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty – and as you do these things, give thanks to God for his wonderful goodness. Reflect on what a gracious God he is to have thought of these gifts. Take the time to experience and savor joy, then direct your heart toward God so that you come to know he is the giver of every good and perfect gift. Nothing is too small if it produces true joy in us and causes us to turn toward God in gratitude and delight.” *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, p.75.

This Sabbath day we rest in grace, this day we cease our busyness. This day we take apart. We gather here for a purpose to be reclaimed by God, renewed by God’s presence and revitalized by God’s spirit within us. We gather this Sabbath and every Sabbath to thank God for life and love and to once again catch a glimpse of the Kingdom that God envisions. Our challenge is to make Sabbath a reality in our lives on an ongoing basis. That each week Sabbath becomes the priority. That we begin to organize our living with Sabbath as a priority. Allowing God to move through our lives to renew and re-create us.

Sabbath is not just something you add to the ‘to do’ list. It is not obligation or duty. It is the centerpiece of our living, a way of living.

When it comes to Sabbath, we think in terms of both quality of time and quantity of time. It is quality time by becoming truly present with God. It is a quantity of time in allowing more than the hour that we gather in this space. Remember the Sabbath, keep it holy by making your life and my life an offering to our God. Coming to this space to refuel. As we worship we stop listening to the news, we stop the worry that tends to consume us. We gather to refocus, to be refreshed, renewed, literally recreated by God's grace. Sabbath is an oasis for the soul.

I read recently a story about a Jewish mother. She lights the candles that stand on her Sabbath table and then holds her hands over the flame and draws her hands to her heart drawing the holiness of the Sabbath to her life and to her family. In this act, she expresses her understanding that we do not create the holiness, we merely embrace the holiness around us.

As we share in this holy meal today, allow your soul to be nourished by the grace of this feast. For in this communion meal we are made new by the love of God.

As we share this meal, embrace the holiness of God and allow total reclamation and recreation by that holiness.

Passing of the Peace followed by Holy Communion.