

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

Sabbath As A Lenten Discipline

As I was scanning through news articles this past week, I came across an article in *The Atlantic* titled “How My Wife and I Took Back Our Sundays”. The subtitle was what really caught my eye. It read: “We have an agreement: one day a week, we do absolutely nothing. In a society obsessed with productivity, this is harder than it should be—but it’s worth it.”

My first instinct upon seeing this headline was to rejoice—someone was speaking openly and vulnerably on a large platform about the importance of sabbath! What a joy! Then, when I read the article more, I grew a bit incredulous. This author was speaking about how he and his wife had begun a “novel, new practice” in their life where they rested on Sundays (church is not a part of this rest for them). I laughed at the idea that this was a new idea, and exclaimed out loud, “you didn’t invent this—God did!”

And yet, as I read the article more and heard the author speak clearly about how much this practice of weekly rest has positively impacted his marriage, his sense of self, his sleep, and his stress levels, I realized that sabbath practice has become so absolutely foreign to our culture and society that it *feels* like a fresh, novel idea, and that its benefits for our whole lives had been forgotten, both by those who do not attend church, but also by those who do.

In this article, the author quotes a statistic that “about half of American employees do work in their free time in order to meet job demands.” This is made more complicated for many with working from home. But you do not have to have a job to know how much stress and pressure creep into all of our waking moments—even if you’re retired or not currently employed, the rush and hustle of our world has certainly found its way to you, too.

The challenge of this rush and hustle is that it keeps us so busy and focused on what is in front of us that we cannot put our minds on God, or on the things God intends, like healthy relationships with our spouses, partners, children, siblings, and parents, like taking care of our bodies that God has called good, like nurturing our sense of wonder and joy. We push to use our free time well and we overschedule ourselves, even on Sundays, and find ourselves forgetting that *even God needed a whole day to rest*. Who are we to think that we don’t?

The church has misunderstood sabbath for a long time—we have treated it as a legalistic challenge, a way to judge ourselves and others as holy or not. We so quickly slip into the mode of “works righteousness”, or believing that by our own actions we can move closer to righteousness in God’s eyes. But we are Lutheran, dear ones—our theology is deeply rooted in the scriptural truth that works righteousness is a hoax, a lie, is a futile, losing game. It is God who moves closer to us in this world, not us who move closer to God. We cannot muster righteousness by our own actions or energy—righteousness comes to us as a gracious gift from a loving God who refuses to be kept separate from us.

So if sabbath isn’t a metric for holiness, and if it isn’t a legalistic trap, what purpose can it serve us?

The rhythm of God’s creating activity in Genesis is to be a model for us of what an ordered relationship with God and creation looks like. When we make intentional space to rest in God, we will experience a peace in our rhythm of life that cannot be found when we ignore our need for sabbath. The purpose of sabbath is to help us reconnect each week to our home in God, to our identity in God, to our rootedness in God, and to how that source of life fuels and informs our relationships with ourselves, others, and creation. Sabbath is not about not lifting a finger; it is about remembering where we came from and where we are going on a regular basis—setting down the heavy burdens that we carry and letting ourselves be carried by God.

This holy and restorative rest in God will look a bit different for everyone, because we are all unique. It should start with time set aside for worship, for receiving the words of forgiveness spoken in community, for receiving Christ’s body and blood as gift at the table of grace, and then it should continue in the kind of rest that you need in order to reconnect with God, with your loved ones, and with yourself.

I invite you into intentional sabbath-taking as a Lenten discipline this year, beloved—into regular rest in the divine, every week.

In Christ, Pastor Marissa