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 Third Sunday of Lent

Sabbath vs. Servitude
Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God 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; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

How often do you identify yourself with your work?

With what you do?

Do you think that your **worth** is connected to your **work**,
 and what you **accomplish**?

Do you ever struggle with **perfectionism**?

And what about this---

Do you ever feel **guilty** when you are not doing something productive?

I know I have.

There's a great book about that by Tim Hansel,
 called "*When I Relax, I Feel Guilty*".

It's about our tendency to work so much, that we don't enjoy life very much.

I think a lot of us struggle with **identifying with our work or our productivity**.

Do you ever wonder if it's ok to just—**do nothing**?

Some say that **perfectionism** is a very pervasive American struggle.

Many perfectionists are type-A workaholics.

People who always think they could do a better job, or more work.

But perfectionists can also be the **opposite of Type-A**.

Some perfectionists become couch-potato procrastinators,
 afraid of doing anything, because it might be less than perfect!

Do you *fall into either category* of perfectionism?
I have certainly struggled with workaholism.

My grandmother helped me with this though when she was alive.
She was this incredible cook and seamstress,
who could make anything and do all the math for sewing in her head,
even though she only had an 8th grade education.

I always considered her work to be ‘perfect’,
but she taught me early on that *doing your best is enough*,
and not everything is going to be perfect.

She lovingly praised my early handmade clothing, and attempts at cooking,
and told me that *if it works, it is good*.
And so I cook—to keep people alive, that’s it.
And I sew—for enjoyment and relaxation.
I do my best, and it is good.
It’s not perfect, and that is ok.

As people of faith,
we are called to *examine our attitudes about work, and perfection*
against the witness of scripture, our ancestors of faith, and the example of Jesus.

And what we learn is this:
Perfectionism is a trap.
None of us is perfect, *only God* is perfect.
And good enough is good.

If we *allow our worth to come from our work*—that is also a trap.
In fact, it’s *WORSE* than that!

People who are valued *ONLY for their work*---are also known as *SLAVES*.
Slavery is about using people, for their work.
It does not recognize people as people,
And it does not allow for rest.

When we get our *VALUE from what we do*,
When we work so much that we do not rest,
That is living in *bondage, and servitude*.
And it is *NOT God’s will* for our lives.

God wants us to live in *freedom*.
 God wants to *liberate us* from being enslaved to work.
 God wants us to have *Sabbath rest*.

The Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt for over 400 years.
 And they were *only valuable to Pharaoh* for their work.
 And when they angered Pharaoh,
 by asking for the opportunity to worship and rest,
 Pharaoh called them lazy,
 and told them that they had to keep their quota of making bricks,
 but now they had to work without being supplied the straw to make those bricks!
 (Exodus 5)

So when *Moses gathers the people in Deuteronomy 5*,
 and starts reciting the Ten Commandments to them,
 When he gets to the 4th commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy,
 He goes on to say this:
*Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God
 brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm;
 therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

Therefore.

That's an important word here—it means that we *honor* the Sabbath,
 we *rest and we celebrate* on the Sabbath—
 all because God has *rescued* us from slavery!
 Sabbath is about *freedom and liberation*---from overwork, and perfectionism.

And Sabbath is a *commandment*—it is not a suggestion, or a recommendation.
 It is a *commandment—designed to free us!*
 A commandment that brings life and liberty—rest, and not work!

And Sabbath time is so much *more than a day off*.
 Pastor Diane Ford of Lincroft Presbyterian has been talking to her church about
 Sabbath as *holy TIME*.
 Sabbath is about *KAIROS time, not CHRONOS time*.
 Those are *two Greek words* for time, with vastly different meanings.

Chronos is the kind of time you see on a clock or a watch.
 It's the minutes and hours in a day, the days in a week.

Kairos time is about an ‘opportune time’, a time of significance.
It is meaningful and transformative.
Chronos is ***quantitative***, but kairos is ***qualitative***.

Sabbath is Kairos time.

And as such, Sabbath can be even ***more meaningful***
than taking ***a day off*** each week.
It can be enjoyed at any time.
It can be a part of each day,
A time set apart for reflection, growth, and transformation.
A time to ***receive*** what God offers us when we celebrate Sabbath.

Pastor Ford brought to my attention a colleague preaching at Sierra Vista
Community Church in Sacramento, California.

Rev. Bob Azzarito says that Sabbath is much more than a day off.

It is a ***worldview***.

It is a ***way of life***.

It is our ***identity as children of God***.

<https://www.sierravistacc.org/worship-services/15th-sunday-after-pentecost>

He suggests that Sabbath is a commandment
because it ***protects our identity*** as children of God.
Our value, and freedom and life—do NOT come from work.
Good work can flow out of value and freedom, but not the other way around.

Now think about that for a moment, because it’s so ***countercultural***,
And ***counterintuitive*** for us as Americans, isn’t it?

Don’t we believe in the ***American dream***,
where hard work is the key to life?
Don’t we believe in a ***pull-yourself-up***-by your bootstraps way of life?
Don’t we believe that God helps those who help themselves,
Even though that’s not in the Bible?

In America, we think that ***we ARE what we DO***.
Our identity is our work.

And you know what that belief leads to?
Does it lead to joy and peace?
No.

It actually leads to an awful lot of *anxiety, depression, fear and guilt!*

Remember last week when I admitted to my own struggles with *Fear* that I won't get everything done in 6 days, and *guilt* that I won't be working and available all the time?

Friends, that is *NOT God's will!*

Workaholism, and perfectionism leads to all kinds of pain and suffering. Just think about this in your own life—have you seen it leading to struggles in body, mind, and spirit?

Remember the idea that my spiritual director shared with me---

That everyone takes

the *same amount of time off of work* over the course of their lives?

Some take it in vacation and days off, OTHERS take it in sick time and suffering.

So, if we want to take God seriously about celebrating Sabbath rest,

We need to see that our identity is about *WHO we are, and WHOSE we are.*

We are *children of God.*

We are *beloved* children of God.

Whether we work, or not!

Regardless of anything we produce, or don't produce,

We are *still beloved children* of God.

Azzarito also reminds us that Sabbath comes directly from God—who is NOT a workaholic!

God rested after 6 days of creation.

Not because God was tired,

but because God wanted to *ENJOY creation!*

God didn't want us to *confuse work and rest,*

so in the creation story, there is a clear distinction.

We work, then we rest.

Sabbath rest is not just a moment of not working.

Sabbath is a deeper rest, a spiritual *renewal and refreshment.*

This is why we talked about Sabbath as *celebration and delight* last week—

Sabbath is a *YES to life, a yes to God.*

It is more of a *party* with people we love, than it is a break from working.

Azzarito goes even further to say that *our real identity*—
is who we are *at rest!*
And our work-- is what we do *in response to our rest!*
Think about that!

He says that we should avoid identifying ourselves as our jobs.
Saying I am a teacher is different than saying *I teach fourth grade.*
I pastor a church is different than saying I am a pastor.
Now, this is really *challenging*,
because our society identifies us so often by our work,
and most of us talk this way about ourselves and one another.
But it sure is something to think about, isn't it?

Maybe this is why it's so important to stop working and celebrate Sabbath instead.
But, does this mean that *celebrating Sabbath is a job?*
I don't think so.
I don't think Sabbath-keeping should be another thing on your to-do list.

That's what happened to some of the Pharisees of Jesus' day.
They took 600 laws and turned them into work.
They turned *the Sabbath into work*, not rest,
with all of the rules and regulations a
about what could or couldn't be done on Sabbath.

This is why Jesus says more than once that He is *Lord of the Sabbath*,
and that the *Sabbath was made for us*, not us for the Sabbath.
It's why he worked, and healed on the Sabbath!

This is why it's so important for us to think about
celebrating Sabbath—because it's *NOT a job.*
It's a time, a kairos time, to remember, rest, and be refreshed.
It's a time of freedom, and transformation!

Carol Betchel, in her PW Horizons Study, "*Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*", says that "*ignoring the Sabbath—even for a good cause—risks unravelling the Exodus. Even good work has it's limits, and the consequences of ignoring this are stunning: work without Sabbath is servitude.*"
Carol Betchel, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, PW Horizons Study, 2022-2023, pg. 48.

Betchel also reminds us that *talking about slavery* in this context, should be done with caution.

Most of us cannot know the depths of suffering of those who have been enslaved.

When we talk about “slavery” in not celebrating Sabbath, we are talking *metaphorically, not literally*.

And we should remember that all forms of slavery *are against God’s will*.

So ,if we don’t want to be workaholics, perfectionists, Or in servitude to our work----*what SHOULD we do, with regard to work?*

Well, what if we find the ‘*good work*’ that *God calls us to do?*

Betchel suggests that there are different kinds of work—

GOOD work, and BAD work.

Bad work is the *forced labor* that the Hebrews experienced in Egypt at the hands of Pharaoh.

Good work is the kind of willing and generous work done by God’s people, like when they came together to build the tabernacle for their place of worship.

Betchel says that *God created work as a GOOD thing*.

In Genesis 2:15 God gave Adam the task of tilling and keeping the Garden.

It was only after sin came into the picture that work became toil, in Genesis 3:17.

The Book of Exodus is actually ‘*bookended*’ with ***BAD work and GOOD work***.

The first 13 chapters detail the years of slavery in Egypt.

The last 15 chapters detail the work of building the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

What’s the difference between the bad work, and good work?

Good work is given freely, with a willing and generous heart.

Bad work is taken from us forcibly, usually out of greed,

like Pharaoh making the Hebrews create bricks without straw!

Carol Betchel, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God’s Gift of Rest and Delight*, PW Horizons Study, 2022-2023, pg. 48-51.

Good work is something that brings *life and joy*.

And, it *recognizes the LIMITS* of time, materials, and energy.

Good work knows that there is a beginning and ending,

and we can and should *only do so much work!*

So does this mean that working for the church, or God—
is always good work?
Not exactly.

The problem comes when we take what we believe to be ‘good work’
and we turn it into *another form of servitude, workaholism, or perfectionism.*
Even good work can become TOO much,
and take away freedom and life!

It’s kind of like the *frog in the boiling water*—
he doesn’t realize it’s boiling until it’s too late,
because the water is slowly heating around him...

We may not realize that we are *turning good work into something bad,*
because it seems like we are working for *a ‘good cause’*---
Working for God, for the church, helping people.
Which is a great thing, right?
Well, not always.

Sometimes as Christians we think that
Sabbath *does not apply* to our good work!
Or we think we don’t have to live with any ‘*margins*’,
because we are doing something worthwhile.
Or we think that staying busy doing ‘good’ things is *not actually “work”*.

But Betchel writes: *For whatever reason, many of us find ourselves back in Egypt, trying to make bricks without straw.we feel like our lives have no margins.*

Ministry becomes our master.

Carol Betchel, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God’s Gift of Rest and Delight*, PW Horizons Study, 2022-2023, pg. 52.

Think about that—especially if you do a lot in this church, or in the community.
Even *ministry can become our master*,
Taking away freedom and life.
That is a recipe for *burn-out*, which all too many Christians understand.

When we really embrace the idea of Sabbath rest,

We avoid the traps of *servitude, perfectionism, and all the negative emotions* associated with that.

And true Sabbath rest is counter-cultural.

It embraces freedom and liberty---for us, and all people.

True Sabbath follows God's justice---

Where we are called to help those who cannot take Sabbath rest,

Until ALL people can enjoy this gift of God.

Sabbath is for *each and every one* of us.

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today.

We are called to Sabbath—the ***freedom of Sabbath rest.***

May we receive this gift, and live in the freedom of being a child of God,

Regardless of what we do, or what we produce.

And for that gift, all God's people can say together, Amen.