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 March 19, 2023
 4th Sunday Lent
 Celebrating Sabbath

Sabbath and Surrender
Exodus 16:1-5, 22-31

*The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim and came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² The whole congregation of the Israelites **complained against Moses and Aaron** in the wilderness. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If **only we had died** by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we **sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread**, for you have brought us out into this wilderness **to kill this whole assembly with hunger.**”*

*⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “**I am going to rain bread from heaven for you**, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will **test** them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be **twice as much** as they gather on other days.”*

*On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: **Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord**; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” ²⁴ So they put it aside until morning, just as Moses commanded them, and it did not rot, and there were no maggots in it. ²⁵ Moses said, “Eat it today, for **today is a Sabbath to the Lord**; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” ²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. ²⁸ The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? ²⁹ See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” ³⁰ So the people **rested on the seventh day.** ³¹ The Israelites called it manna; it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*

Today is the **4th Sunday of Lent**, and the fourth week in our series called *Soul Care: Celebrating Sabbath*.

We are learning about the *gift of Sabbath alongside* our friends at Lincroft Presbyterian Church.

We are learning more about this 4th commandment, designed to refresh and renew us.

Each week we've been looking at a *different aspect* of Sabbath—*Rest, Celebration, Freedom, and today Surrender.*

I wonder, *do you ever struggle to surrender to a Sabbath* each week?

I know I do.

Fridays are my Sabbath.

And sometimes on Fridays I hesitate to take it as a Sabbath, because I feel like I didn't get enough done before Friday.

But every time I do take the day for rest, and I leave my work and my sermon behind, the rest that I receive on that Sabbath day helps me to get everything done the next day--- and it's usually *done better* than if I had worked straight through the week!

Have you ever found it to be true that taking a rest, actually *helps you accomplish more* when you return to work? It's great how that *refreshes* us—body and soul, isn't it?

Surrendering to Sabbath can be challenging though, for many reasons.

For one thing, many of us feel *guilty* when we really relax.

Remember the book I mentioned last week, by Tim Hansel?

It's called "*When I Relax, I Feel Guilty*"

It's such a good book because it's so true for many people.

I know I struggle with guilt when I'm not working—do you?

Surrender is also difficult because *so often we want MORE---*

More of *something*—whether it's more house, more car, more electronics, more food, more clothes....

Almost all of us have a standard of living well above the rest of the world,

But our *culture tells us that we need MORE*—of just about everything!

And it's so easy for us to get caught up that temptation for more.

That becomes a reason to keep working, and not rest.

The story of the manna in the wilderness is a story about *surrender and Sabbath.*

In this story, the Israelites are *complaining* to Moses

after being freed from slavery in Egypt.
 They have even seen God part the Red Sea for them,
 But here they are wondering how they will eat!

They start *talking like Egypt had been so much better*, when of course it wasn't:
*They say: "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,
 when we sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread,
 for you have brought us out into this wilderness
 to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

So God says: *"I am going to rain **bread from heaven** for you,
 and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.
 In that way I will **test** them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.
 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in,
 it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."*

Amazing, right?
 God gives them this manna—a kind of sweet bread—
 that they find outside on the ground every morning.
 And all God asks is that they *gather only what they need for that day*.

If they gather *too much, the manna rots*.
 But on the 6th day of the week, they could gather twice as much,
 So they would not need to get anything on the 7th day.
 Because that was the *day of rest, a Sabbath*.

Seems pretty *straightforward*.
 But people being people, some tried to gather extra, and it spoiled.
 And other people tried to gather some on the Sabbath, and there was no manna.

Now just think about this story for a minute.
 They were instructed to only gather what they needed for **THAT DAY!**
 That's it.

Can you imagine doing that?
 That's requires some real *trust* in God, doesn't it?

I wonder *what we would have done*—would you have tried to gather more?
 Or to store it? Or to gather on the Sabbath?
 I think I would have been really tempted to gather more than one days' worth.
 What about you?

Can you see the *great lesson* in this story?

This story is *full of miracles*, all the way around.
 The manna itself was a miracle, because it appeared each morning 6 days a week.
 The fact that God provided for them was a miracle.
 But the biggest miracle of all?

The *biggest miracle* was probably that some of the Israelites
 Actually *obeyed* God's directions,
 and *learned to trust* God through all of this.

Do we *trust God* the way they did?
 Or do we *trust OURSELVES*?
 Do we trust God to provide, or do we rely solely on our own hard work?
 Our own productivity?

I think if we're honest, the latter is often the case.
We trust our ability to provide for ourselves,
 Much more than we trust God to provide for us.

We live in that *kind of culture*—the hard work ethic of America,
 The idea that we can get whatever we want, through hard work.
 But so much of that is a myth, because we are indebted to God
 who gives us the ability to work, who gives us opportunities,
 who gives us other people who make it possible for us to work.
 We cannot and do not earn things, just on our own.
 We are *all connected* in life, and work.

Problem is, most of struggle with *identifying ourselves with our work*.
 We think *we ARE what we do*.
 Instead of just being children of God, who also work.
 We think our *worth* is based on how much we do,
 or how productive we are in any given day.
 But God says we are worthy just because we exist,
 because *God made us, in the image of God*.
 We are children of God, first and foremost, whether we work or not!

And Sabbath means *we stop all work, and we rest—each week*.
 It's interesting, we know that the idea of Sabbath comes from the 7th day of
creation, when God rested,

And then we think of this as the *4th of the 10 Commandments*.

But guess when the miracle of manna happens?

Before they receive the 10 commandments.

The idea of Sabbath was woven into this experience,
so that God could show them that Sabbath is *a way of life, not just a command*.

It's part of this story because *Sabbath is about surrender and trust*.

Surrendering our desire for more,
and trusting that God gives us enough.

Through gathering the manna each day,
The Israelites *learned the meaning of 'enough'*.
Enough for the day,
Enough for the Sabbath, so that rest could happen!

The question is *do WE know the meaning of "enough"?*

Do we know when to say that we don't need any more---

No more house, cars, clothes, food, electronics...?

Carol Betchel in her PW study on Sabbath,
Mentions a powerful bumper sticker she saw:

Insatiable is Not Sustainable

Isn't that so true?

Especially in this country?

Carol Betchel, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, PW Horizons Study, 2022-2023, pg. 42.

And yet, in all this talk of too much, and always striving for more,
We should be mindful that *not everyone has enough in our country*.

During Covid especially, 1 in 5 kids were hungry.

Not everyone has enough,
and that's where *Sabbath and justice* come together.

Not everyone has enough, and not everyone gets to take a weekly Sabbath rest,
because they are barely making ends meet, and can't stop working.

So we should be *caring for those in need*.

We should be lifting them up, literally and spiritually.

And *working for conditions* that help people take a Sabbath rest, and have enough.

Sabbath and Surrender are also about **LIMITS**.

Ruth Haley Barton, in her book *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, says that we need a **spirituality of limits** when it comes to Sabbath.

We need to know where to **say ‘no’**,
so that we can say **‘yes’ to God, and yes to life**.
Barton says that in order to celebrate Sabbath rest,
We should say **‘no’ to:**

Work

Consumerism

Stress and

Technology

Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, Intervarsity: Illinois, 2022, pg. 98.

Easier said than done, right?

How hard is it for you to stop working? Or to stop shopping?

What about to stop worrying? Or stop using technology?

Two weeks ago we talked about strategies to do these things,
like maybe even a **Sabbath box**,

where you can put your phone or computer as you rest.

I’ve often used a **worry box**, where I write down prayer requests and concerns,

And leave them in the box as I surrender to God in prayer.

It’s a **tangible way to surrender** our stress.

Once we say ‘no’ to all those things that keep us from resting,

We can say **‘yes’ to three big things:**

Resting the body

Resting the mind

Restoring the Spirit

Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, Intervarsity: Illinois, 2022, pg. 98.

We need Sabbath rest—**each week**,

and many would say we need a **mini-Sabbath each day**.

We need time to stop moving, stop thinking, working,

And **just be**.

And we need time to **restore the soul**—we need time for worship, prayer, Bible study, reading, meditating, journaling.

We need time to just listen to God,

And enjoy God's beautiful *creation*.

Take a walk out to our outdoor worship area and memorial garden sometime,
stop and pray and rest.

Enjoy the view of the lake, read the brick walkway,
and just sit and breathe fresh air.

It is so beautiful out there, and so good for the soul!

Friends, ***how can you celebrate Sabbath,***
and ***surrender your work and worries*** to God?

Betchel asks the great question:

What does ***your rhythm*** of work and rest say about your ***priorities?***

Carol Betchel, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, PW Horizons Study, 2022-2023, pg. 42.

What if making time for sabbath helps us ***get our priorities straight?***

Ruth Haley Barton suggests that we begin our Sabbath
with a ***simple prayer*** like this one:

God, we ask not for what we want, but what you know we need.

God does know what we need.

And it all ***starts with surrender.***

Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*, Intervarsity: Illinois, 2022, pg. 84.

Remember the verses of our first week of Sabbath study?

It was from ***Matthew 11:28-30***

Jesus says: *Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"

Can you see how ***Sabbath and Surrender are intricately connected?***

How can you ***celebrate Sabbath rest?***

How can you ***stop striving***, stop gathering, stop buying, stop collecting—
to rest--one day a week, and maybe a little each day?

How can you see that your ***worth*** is not based on what you have,
or earn, or produce?

Surrendering to Sabbath is ***FREEDOM***,

Freedom ***from*** servitude to our work or busy-ness,

Freedom ***for*** our relationship with God, and with one another.

After the sermon I have **a gift for each of you**
If you wish to come forward and receive it.
It is a purple candle, the color of this Lenten season,
A candle you could use when you take Sabbath.
When you light it at home,
I encourage you to then blow it out and *watch the smoke rise to God,*
And as you see that smoke rise---*surrender your cares to God.*
Maybe this can be the symbol that starts your 'official' Sabbath rest.
Candles are something our Jewish brothers and sisters use each week to start the Sabbath.

They have a Hebrew blessing, and I want to teach you a bit of it, so that when we share a meal in Lincroft, we can share a Sabbath blessing together.

It begins with: Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu....
We praise you, Eternal God, King of the Universe....

Friends, may we all *embrace the gift* of Sabbath,
And *surrender* everything that hinders that.
And for this gift, all God's people can say together, Amen.