

Sabbath Relationships
Exodus 17:8-13
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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If you have been paying attention, which I know you all have, you know that over the course of this month we are looking at different aspects of sabbath.

So, let's talk again for a moment about that word - about sabbath. What is sabbath? What do we think of when we hear the word sabbath?

Well, for a lot of us, as Christians, we think of sabbath as Sunday. We think of it as a day, a set day of the week. We think of it as the day that we come to worship.

Some of us remember a time here in the United States when stores and other businesses weren't open on Sundays, so then Sunday was often a day of worship as well as a time for gathering with family, sometimes friends. It was about slowing down and not doing work.

And those last two things - slowing down and not doing work - they are, as we heard in Deuteronomy last week, at the heart of sabbath. We call that rest.

But we are also well served to remember that sabbath isn't only about rest. It is about many other things. Things connected with the intentionality with which we live within that rest, within that time we take away from our regular routines. So, rest isn't just for the sake of rest, and not all rest is sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is purposeful. It is intentional. It is rest for renewal, for resetting, for nurturing relationships.

Perhaps we see this idea of sabbath relationships most obviously as we talk about our relationship with God. Sabbath, after all, is one of those first four commandments, the ones that we name as being connected to how we relate to God. So we expect that sabbath, at least for those of us who claim to be people of faith, should include connection with God. That's why we often connect it to worship, right?

But, as we said last week, sabbath also bridges us into the commandments that are about how we relate to other humans. And this is likely not accidental. After all, if we are in right relationship with God *and* when we are well rested, then we are more likely to be in right relationship with other people.

Wayne Muller tells the story of a physician named Charles. While physicians are required, from the moment they begin med school to work while exhausted, Charles talked about when he realized something important. "I discovered in medical school," Charles told [Muller], "that if I saw a patient when I was tired or overworked, I would order a lot of tests. I was so exhausted, I couldn't tell exactly what was going on. I could see the symptoms, I could recognize the possible diagnoses, but I couldn't really hear

how it all fit together. So I got in the habit of ordering a battery of tests, hoping they would tell me what I was missing.'

Charles went on saying, "But when I was rested - if I had an opportunity to get some sleep, or go for a quiet walk - when I saw the next patient, I could rely on my intuition and experience to give me a pretty accurate reading of what was happening. If there was any uncertainty about my diagnosis, I would order a single, specific test to confirm or deny it. But when I could take the time to listen and be present with them and their illness, I was almost always right" (Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, New York: Bantam Books, 1999; 6).

Charles' story reminds us that even on the occasions when we take sabbath time alone, on our own, for rest and renewal, we are never disconnected from relationships with either God or other people.

How we are makes a difference in how we are with others. It's the reason the flight attendants tell you to put your own mask on first. In order to be well with and for others, we need to take care of ourselves, to rest, to renew, to give ourselves a break.

But the connection between sabbath and relationships is not only about our taking time away from people in order that we can be better for them. No, sabbath often happens in the midst of relationships.

We come to worship God together. We gather - whether onsite or online - because we know that other people matter to our worship, to our faith, to our rest and renewal.

We share sabbath time with each other. Whether that be a slow meal where we linger at the table, a quiet walk in the woods, or an intentional time of praying together.

We offer each other sabbath with a foot massage, a warm bowl of soup, or the simple words, "You stay put...I'll handle this."

See, too often we think of sabbath only as what we are doing here in worship. We think of sabbath as a day and too often we only allow it to be Sunday. But sabbath comes in all shapes and sizes, at various moments and through different people.

What if we started to recognize sabbath more broadly?

Yes, it is lovely when we have sabbath days...whole days where we break away from the routine and demands of production in order to simply be.

And, yes, one of the ways we experience sabbath is by gathering and worshipping together.

But, what if sabbath is more than this? ... What if we find sabbath in moments? ...

What if we find sabbath in people? ... What if sabbath rest not only helps us be a better person, but what if people help us to find sabbath rest?

I remember the day I realized how loud a raw carrot is. I was on silent retreat. But it wasn't my carrot I noticed, because I was on silent retreat with others. I had learned to do this in seminary. Before that if I heard the words silent retreat, I would have assumed that it was only something you did by yourself. But I was invited to a silent retreat in community. And I later invited others to that same practice. During our day and a half of silence we did not avoid each other. Rather, we sat together. We walked together. We ate together, and yes, inevitably the retreat center served carrots. We worshiped together. We prayed together. We lived together in silence and we saw and heard and received amazing gifts.

Because not only are relationships better when we are well rested, but relationships - good, trusted relationships - can give us the gift of rest as well.

And this is something we often miss in today's text. Often we just read this as a story of struggle in the wilderness as the people are journeying from slavery to freedom, but have battles that get in their way. Or, we just read this as another war story and sometimes read right past it because there are more war stories in the Bible than we might like.

But, if we can look beyond that, what we see is life in relationship. Here in this story, everyone is dependent upon everyone else. And Moses, who has the pressure of being the leader, is not alone. Not only is Moses deeply rooted in an active relationship with God, but when he tires, Aaron and Hur are by his side not only to cheer him on but to literally hold him up.

Friends, we are built for relationships.

And sabbath is built for relationships, too. Sabbath helps us create space to slow down, to listen, to talk, to eat in a way that allows us to really taste our food and appreciate our company. Sabbath is offered in moments when we touch another's worn out body with care...when we help a friend realize it is time to stop...when we support someone by holding up their arms when they are too weak to do so.

We live in a culture that praises independence. But we are created for the reality of interdependence. Sabbath allows us to see this and experience this. Sabbath makes us ready for it, that we might become more fully who we are because we make this journey together. Amen.