

YOU GOTTA LOOK AT IT

Sabbath Frees You to Worship | Press Pause (Part 2)

Text: Psalm 90:12; 92:1-2; 100

Don't Just Do Anything

A man was seated on a park bench when a small lad, maybe five years-old, sat down and started fidgeting with what appeared to be a prized possession. The man looked more closely and saw that the child was winding a Mickey Mouse watch. "What a neat watch!" the man exclaimed. "Does it tell you the time?" the man asked. "Nope," said the boy, **"You gotta LOOK at it."**

We are thinking this month about the subject of TIME, and if there is one over-arching message to be had, it is this: "You gotta look at it." We don't serve God or ourselves well by merely having a watch on our wrist or a calendar on our phone or wall, if we're not looking carefully at how we are actually spending this most precious of all commodities.

Not long ago, I came across a provocative article entitled: "If You Are 35, You Have 500 Days to Live." The writer suggested that when you take out the time you spend sleeping, working and doing chores, tending to matters of health and hygiene, managing your money, travelling and eating, and a myriad of other time-eaters, you have in the NEXT 35 years just about 500 days to do the meaningful things that honor God's purposes and make the most of your life. Because a few of us are actually MORE than 35 years old, the words of the Psalmist come to mind: **"Teach us to number our days, Lord, so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." (Psa 90:12)**

In the readings from the Book of Exodus we examined last weekend, we learned that in his Fourth Commandment, God says that one of the wisest things we can do to orient ourselves properly is to STOP our relentless DOING. **Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work... (Exo 20:9-10)** Spend one day a week without doing chores, without checking the screens, without ticking down the to-do list, without rushing here and there. Devote one full day a week to rediscovering what it is to be a human BEING in a world where a hundred Pharoahs want to turn you into a human doing. Don't just DO something; STAND there! Or SIT there. Or LIE DOWN there. Or STROLL there.

What to Do With Your Pause

Last week, I suggested that God calls us to observe the Sabbath – to make it holy, truly sacred to us -- for many of the same reasons that we PRESS PAUSE in the middle of an action-packed movie. Sabbath is a time to freeze the frame of life and really look at its details. If you're wondering what to do with your Sabbath, stoop and really look at a flower. Go to the zoo and truly observe the animals there. Stop by an art gallery and

linger over some artwork. Stop to study and savor the beauty and goodness of life. Take notes on it. Use your camera or your paintbrush, or your pen to capture something of the wonder of it. Talk to someone else about what strikes you about the miracle and majesty, the burning bushes and setting suns, you would have passed by without seeing, had you not taken a Sabbath. In the words of St. Winnie-the-Pooh: "Poetry and hums aren't things which you get, they are things which get you. And all you can do is go where they find you."

Secondly, use the PAUSE that Sabbath provides you to reflect on what just happened in the movie storyline behind you. You've probably come here today having had quite a week. Discuss with a friend or other loved one, what happened to you over these past days and how you felt about it. What were the high and low points and why? Perhaps journal your reflections, your learnings, the experiences that stirred something significant in you. What has God been trying to impress on you? Process your life; don't just blitz on to the next scene.

Author Keri Wyatt Kent reminds us that this is something we can do each day, as well as on the Sabbath day. "At the end of each day, stop....Take time to think about your day, to notice where God was in it and where you were blessed, and to say, 'It's good.' Then go back at it the next day. And after six days, take a whole day off. And say 'it's really good.' Spend a whole day just pausing, just reflecting on how really good it is, and then start the dance again, at a sustainable pace."

Which brings us to a third important practice of Sabbath: SLOW down your pace on this day. Go for a walk, or a bike ride, or a leisurely drive through the neighborhood or country with the windows open. Visit the Arboretum or the Forest Preserve or the Lake Front. Go slow enough on this day to let your jangled nerves truly settle and for your pounding life to still. Let this greater peace help you get prepared for what lies ahead. Think about the people and situations you'll face when the movie of your life picks up again. Think of the kind of person you want to be in the days ahead and ask God for his power to be that. In this way, you will bring a more peaceful, purposeful, Spirit-filled self to next week's episodes. And you and others won't be sorry you did.

Fourthly, use your Sabbath to attend to your bodily needs. Someone confessed to me last week that that was a major reason they often pressed Pause on their screen at home. And that's legitimate! How did we let life's wheel get turning so fast that much of the time we race along, forsaking our need to eat or sleep or even go to the bathroom. Sabbath is a time to renew our bodily strength. Enjoy a feast on your Sabbath. Take a long afternoon snooze with no apology or guilt. By all means, go to the bathroom, take a long bath, stretch yourself in the sun, roll in the hay with your spouse, go for an easy run, get a massage. Love this body God has given you. It is one of his kindest graces.

Fifthly, to truly live into Sabbath, give your full attention to someone. I shared last week that one of the most frequent reasons I press pause when I'm watching a show is because someone wants to interrupt, I mean TALK (!), with me. I say that jokingly, because I often need to be interrupted in my self-absorbed routines. One of the best uses of a Sabbath is to practice giving our full and undivided attention to the precious

people in the room of life with us. When was the last time you dedicated your whole day – or even half a day -- to being fully present to someone you say you love? When they're gone, what would you give to have that time back?

Turning Aside to See God's Glory

As the little boy with the Mickey Mouse watch observed, time doesn't shout at you. "You Gotta Look At It." Sabbath is God's invitation to us to stop and see his grace. But not only his grace. Above all else, GOD wants us to devote significant time each week to stopping and looking at HIM. The Old Testament Psalmist put it this way in one of the most famous Sabbath Songs of ancient Israel:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵ For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100:1-5)

From ancient times, Jewish and Christian people have made joining together to WORSHIP a central part of their Sabbath practice. Why is that? Why does God care that you are spending part of this your Sabbath day here in a WORSHIP service? And why should you care to make that a continuing priority in your life? For TWO reasons.

The first reason is because worship helps us release the burden of self-dependence. In the words of the Psalmist, it calls us to remember that **the Lord is God** and we are not. It is easy to become confused about this. Whatever pious things we say with our mouths, it is easy to settle into a life that, practically speaking, places ourselves as the prime movers, the great creators, the true providers of our own existence. We become like Bart Simpson who, when asked to say grace before a meal, responds: "Thanks, God, for nothing. Dad bought the food and Mom made it. Amen."

Truthfully, however, Mom or Dad, were not the SOURCE of the food. Dad certainly brought the food home from the store. Mom definitely seasoned and heated it. But neither Mom nor Dad made the soil, or the molecules in the meat and vegetables, or the myriad marvelous processes from which the food came. They weren't the ones who brought into being, nor sustained, the farmers and ranchers and truck drivers behind that meal. Neither parent even played the roles THEY did on the basis of their own self-created strength. GOD is the source of all this. To draw on my earlier comments, GOD is the source of the time we spend and the beauty and goodness we experience. He is the source of our bodies and of all the people who bejewel our lives. It is God who originates and sustains life's motion picture. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." **It is HE who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Psa 100:3)**

And isn't that a relief? To think or live like everything depends upon us – upon our

ingenuity and energy and goodness – is a crushing burden. If it all rested on us, then we shouldn't take 10 minutes off from our work, much less a day. But Sabbath-keeping is a counter-cultural statement that we trust in GOD's provision and not OUR production as the ultimate SOURCE of life. As Eugene Peterson says: "If you don't take a sabbath, something is wrong. You're doing too much... You've got to quit. One day a week. And just watch what God is doing when you're not doing anything." Do this and you will discover what the Psalmist knew -- that: **His faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psa 100:5)**

The second and final reason why worship is such an important part of celebrating the Sabbath is because worship helps us develop the gratitude that is the well-spring of joy. I don't know about you, but when I come to a worship service like this, something changes for me. I come in with a whole set of gripes and worries. I've got a list of people who bug me and problems that plague me and gaps that grieve me.

But, being here, reorients me. Here, I become aware of how many things are going right in my life. I see the magnificent and miniscule graces that permeate every aspect of my every-day journey. When I worship on the Sabbath, I realize that the goodness and love of God is both the underlying and overarching condition of my existence. And I feel thankful. As I sit with that gratitude, there bubbles up within me a sense of joy.

How about YOU? How many common and amazing graces have you experienced in life? How much is God's providence carrying you today? The Psalmist was convinced he knew, and he puts it this way: **Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever. (Psa 100:4-5)** Are you going to be able to live with that perspective as you move through these days ahead? Will you find the peace and joy that God wants to give you? I'll be blunt: You're not likely to discover this kind of freedom without committing yourself to the discipline of Sabbath and making worship your priority. You have this time as a gift from God for your flourishing. But like the kid said, "You gotta look at it."

Let's pray together...