

March 21, 2020 WholeLife Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2800 N Orange Ave, Orlando Exodus 20:8-11 About Sabbath. . . What does “keeping it holy” mean for us today?

I hope that you are healthy and safe as this message reaches you. I seek God’s blessing, not to give you more, but to awaken each of us to all that is ours from him.

This week in the midst of the pandemic of COVID-19 on several occasions I’ve been drawn to a little chorus that was built from the instructional invitational verse 1 Peter 5:7 “Cast all your care on him for he cares for you!” The song’s lyrics I’ve reworked for me making it a song sung directly to God. I cast all my care upon you. I lay all of my burdens down at your feet. And any time that I don’t know what to do, I will cast all my cares upon you.”

It is true, it was something we could do the day before we’d ever heard of the Corona Virus, and it’s a song we can sing, a verse we can recall all through this journey until life shifts again into whatever new normal will be. At all times everywhere we can cast all our cares, worries, anxieties, fears, on our God knowing the one who knows all, has all powerful and is all cares about each one of us.

I want to invite you this week to send someone you care about some words of hope. Tell someone about your concerns and how you’ve given them to Jesus. Speak a word of hope and faith and love into one another’s lives. Call an older friend, a parent, neighbor, fellow church member and check on them. This week set a course not to be abandoned when this pandemic I behind us, of making a contribution, of being an encourager, of being a voice and person of calmness in the storm because Jesus has spoken into all our storms and said “Peace, be still.” Let’s pray.

Father, you are good and your mercy endures forever. Right now you know all the sick and suffering and we pray for healing. Maybe it is the virus, or maybe its cancer, or the common cold, or just sickness of heart. Right now we pray for one another and for your intervention and for your will being done here on our earth as it is in heaven. During our forced change of pace, for some maybe more hectic, for others maybe a little different kind of time on their hands, may we come to value Sabbath even more, in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

It is ironic that our current series about Sabbath, may play itself out under these days of “social separation,” which may call us to Sabbath more authentically than is our regular practice.

So far in our thinking “About Sabbath” we first considered the origins of Sabbath. We recognized that people often only go back to the formation of the Jewish nation at Sinai but that the Sabbath’s origins are at creation and give it a universal application for all of humanity.

Last week we considered Jesus’ work of freeing Sabbath from the legalistic bondage it had fallen prey to with the Scribes and Pharisees. We recognized that Sabbath is plagued with two detractors: Legalism making Sabbath a salvation by works performance burden, and busyness, maybe a more tempting detractor today, that simply causes it to be ignored. Jesus restored a proper understanding of Sabbath. It is for us. It is an institution of God to save us from ourselves and our legalistic bent to go our own way.

Today we will dig into what does “keeping it holy” mean for us today.

For those of you who grew up as Sabbath keepers or Sabbatarian's, the opening line of what we call the "fourth commandment" sort of set the stage regarding Sabbath.

First we are called to "Remember the Sabbath day." In God's infinite wisdom he knew his creation. Even in the perfection of the fresh creation, in a world with no sin, humans would be most healthy, physically, mentally and spiritually with the establishment of a Sabbath rhythm. The music of life would have six beats and then a rest, six working beats, six noise making beats, six life creating beats, six creation ordering beats and then a rest. Life, real life, would find this rhythm six beats of the music of life and a rest!

A couple of weeks ago we reminded ourselves that at Sinai God gave his ten words about how freed slaves would live and that fourth word, fourth commandment says they will remember the Sabbath day.

That remembering disallows the Sabbath day from being absorbed into the week as just another day. When we remember we give attention to, we recall, we fail at forgetting. The children of Israel being freed from slavery and our being freed from sin and eternal death from the amazing sacrifice of Jesus, just like freed slaves must celebrate our own emancipation both with and because of remembering Sabbath.

But Sabbath, while a great remembering time is more than a family reunion, or an alumni weekend. At those occasions there's lots of remembering. The sports minded recall games played or pennants won. Stories will be remembered of amazing athletic accomplishments. Those who sang or played in some music group will remember that especially wonderful concert. The brainy ones will remember a great lecture or an exam that was aced.

But here in these words we are called to more than just remembering. Remembering isn't just for the joy of recalling. There's a purpose, we remember to re-engage in the game.

Followers of God, freed from literal slavery or the slavery of sin, will be people who "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

We are called to remember it and keep it holy. We don't make it holy! We don't sanctify the day. From it's origins God is the one who blessed it and sanctified made it holy. The story of creation week is amazing and challenging, but in the whole of that week nothing else was sanctified, not light not air not land not sea nor creatures just one day, a unit of time was sanctified another word for made holy.

Many years later God tells his people, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep holy."

So here's what holy means: set apart, hallowed, respected, blessed, divine, righteous.

So how do we keep it, retain it, preserve it, hold on to it, keep it holy.

In passing earlier this week I asked several people. It was interesting that in their upbringing in a home that would have self-identified as a "Sabbath keeping" family, the ones I spoke to had little remembrance of much focus on the holy part.

There was emphasis on Sabbath “keeping” and not breaking it. I think it is fascinating that having this one day of freedom from work, not just for the believer, but by extension to anyone in their circle, that from this glorious freedom from work it has too often been turned into a work, to work at not working.

People sometimes “work” at keeping the Sabbath and by that they mean scrupulous avoidance of certain activities. Does a lot of attention and focus and effort and identification of what might be permissible what is definitely off limits is this what it means to retain, preserve the reality that it is a day set apart by God and made holy?

Is a day of worrying about whether what you are doing at the moment might be “braking the Sabbath” as opposed to “keeping the Sabbath” is that really what God had in mind, when he wrote with his finger, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

It seems that what God did was finished his creation and then create a front porch day. A day to just sit with God. A whole day sanctified and made holy for being. To rest, cease doing and sink in the richness of being.

On our best Sabbaths, on our best days for being we have given thought to the transition from doing to being. Our worlds so much revolve around doing for accomplishment and accumulation.

Sabbath is a way of saying, “Enough.” You can stop. To stop work is simply a concrete means to stop our insatiable hunger for more. Remembering the Sabbath, pulling it to the front of our minds so sundown Friday is no surprise. It’s like this appointment we put on our calendars as the sunsets on Saturday for next Friday evening. We plan our lives looking forward to sitting on the porch, walking in the woods, napping in a hammock, kicking waves at the ocean. Keeping Sabbath holy isn’t about figuring out what is holy and what is not, because the day the blessed 24 hours are holy, and keeping it may be most about remembering it 24/7 and knowing that when it arrives it will be, in the words of John Mark Comer, a wonderful life-giving practice to break our addiction to the West’s twin gods:

accomplishment and accumulation. Comer, John Mark. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (pp. 168-169). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Even among maybe especially among people who have been observant of Sabbath there is need for Sabbath reform. Conservatives in our denomination hear me say that and they are like finally we are going to tighten things up abit. But the Sabbath reform about which I’m thinking isn’t what’s okay and not okay on Sabbath. It is really about letting Sabbath influence how we live the other six days.

It isn’t possible for us to run at top speed doing our work, good work, work done with God honoring excellence, but in a way that it is hard to be still because there is a restlessness to accomplish and accumulate.

And each week Sabbath is meant to remind us that now matter how we try to still the restlessness within it is only stilled when we find our rest in God. We say we love him but we need to better learn to just sit with him!

Several nights ago my grandson got out of the pool and was chilly and he came and sat with me on the lounge chair, later my grand daughter did the same and if God enjoys having his kids with him as much

as I enjoyed those moments no wonder he blessed and made holy a day for sitting together for just being!

Remembering the Sabbath to keep it holy isn't just about that day. It is about what ceasing for 24 hours speaks into our lives 24/7.

Keeping it holy is to remember it not just on Saturday but to allow it's amazing grace and truth infiltrate all our days.

Maybe one of the greatest testimonies about keeping Sabbath Holy doesn't even mention either word but for us to cease from caring for ourselves and to rest in the Father's care for us is the very essence of Sabbath rest.

"Look at the birds of the air," Jesus once said, "they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Practice of Saying No: A HarperOne Select*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

This ceasing from work and worry; this stepping back from both accumulation and accomplishment not just on the whole day reserved for this but then allowing it to spill over into all of life.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, Sabbath is the true God's gift to those who wish to rest and to be free—and who are willing to guard those same gifts for every living thing in their vicinity as well. Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Practice of Saying No: A HarperOne Select*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

So what does it mean to keep it holy? It means to remember it to honor it and to tenaciously train ourselves to take 24 hours to be rather than do. This won't be simple, or easy, and some people won't understand when we say "no" to worthy causes.

But keeping it holy, saying yes to our God means saying no to all, all, his rivals, and to simply be with our God.

Sitting on the porch. Worshipping with a group of fellow believers.
Kicking waves at the beach or napping in a hammock, or enjoying a great meal together, or visiting someone who is lonely, We can remember it and it will be kept holy as we believe in the one who made it holy and use that day that sanctuary in time to be with our holy God.