

Deuteronomy 5:12-15
Psalm 81:10-10

2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Mark 2:23-3:6

Most of you know I grew up on a small dairy farm in Iowa. Every day Dad was out of the house before 6:00 A.M. to milk the cows, and he would end the day milking. Seven days a week, for decades. Every Sunday afternoon Dad would take a nap, and I would think to myself, "What a waste of time!"

However, now I would have to agree with Pastor William Boggs, who wrote:

One of the most sacred of my Sabbath Day activities is my afternoon nap. I usually get up well before the sun, grumble my way through coffee and; the sermon outline, then dash off to church to confront the unnerving tasks of candles that will not stay lighted; microphones with loose connections; last-minute liturgical adjustments; and people who confront me with an array of needs, requests, questions, complaints, and demands. Sunday at 1:00 p.m. I remind my children that the eleventh commandment is: "Six days shalt thou labor, but on the seventh afternoon thou shalt nap."

What has happened to the nap? What has happened to sabbath?

Have we, as a society, become so focused on productivity, so obsessed with being busy, that we do not take naps? Have we become so busy that we do not want to or even know how to take sabbath? Are we so obsessed with productivity that we do not think it is worth our time to relax, to refresh ourselves. As a society, we glorify "busyness." We glorify the workaholic, the person who works sixty hours a week, who never takes vacation or holidays. One study indicated that only 57% of American use their vacation days. Even when we are on vacation and are at the beach, we take our smartphones with us and believe we have to answer the phone calls or the emails. Gotta take this call. Gotta answer this email. We glorify the soccer Moms, those parents who rush around taking their children to and from school activities, music lessons, sports practice, and Scouts. We admire busy people: Boy, look at him, he's busy! We like to look busy! We have come to measure a person's worth by how busy they are, by

how much they work. We have become time driven and obsessed with productivity. We have come to glorify the rat race of life. What kind of life is this?

Europeans work less hours a week than we do. In Germany and France, many work 35 hours a week. In Germany, most get 25 to 30 paid vacation days. The law requires twenty. Many Europeans get about 5 weeks of vacation. You don't have to work for ten or twenty years to get that much time off. You get that after working a year. The French government passed a "right to disconnect" law which gives workers the right to ignore emails, and will protect them from bosses that would punish them for not answering work emails in hours they're not supposed to be working. As Americans, we are brick-makers!

What do I mean by brick-making. It is a term that the Old Testament scholar Dr. Walter Brueggemann uses in referring to the ways of the oppressive Egyptian empire, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, nothing more than cogs in Pharaoh's empire. They worked seven days a week making bricks. I am not using the term exactly the same way Dr. Brueggemann does, but what I mean by brick-making is our busyness, productivity, referring to the workaholics, the soccer moms, the people who don't take all their vacation days or their holidays, who are constantly tethered to the office with their laptops, their tablets, their smartphones, even when it is a vacation or a day off. We go to the beach with our chairs, our umbrellas, our suntan lotion and sun glasses, and our laptops, tablets, and smart phones. We are brick makers!

That is not what God intended for us. God gave us the Sabbath as a day to escape from the oppression of brick making. Many of you know that one of the Ten Commandments is that of not working on the Sabbath day. Moreover, if I were to ask

you why are we to not work on the Sabbath day, those of you who know the answer would say because God rested on the Sabbath day. He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. However, are you aware that the Ten Commandments are listed twice? Once in Exodus 20, and the one we read from this morning, Deuteronomy 5. The commandments are the same in both of these passages are the same. However, the rationale for observing the Sabbath day is different in the Deuteronomic account. "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there...; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day." Remember that at one time you were slaves, working seven days a week. But now you are freed from your oppression. You are not brick makers any more. Take a day off a week! Time off is God's gift to you. Our Creator did not intend for us to be brick makers, to work seven days a week, to be in a big hurry going nowhere. The Sabbath commandment is God's gift to us.

God did not give us this commandment as another "thou shalt not." These were not some arbitrary laws that God gave us to see if we could pass some sort of test. These were given for our good and the common good, and the commandment to observe the Sabbath is a good example. All work and no play does make Jack a dull boy. More than just dull in terms of not being fun, but dull in terms of creativity, being at our best. Roy Ashford claims, "When Leonardo da Vinci was painting 'The Last Supper' in the little Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, he spent a good deal of time in apparent idleness out in the cloister, much to the annoyance of the monks who were paying for his services. For a time nothing was said, but finally a delegation went to the artist and complained that the church was not getting its money's worth. Leonardo heard

them out, then explained simply, "When I pause the longest, I make the most telling strokes with my brush." Rest and relaxation charges our batteries. Some employers and corporations offer paid sabbaticals, time off. Yes, the employers benefit because these extended periods of time off help attract and retain valued people. But they also know time off, sabbaticals, energize the workforce and make them more productive and creative. And time off is good for our physical health. Our bodies need rest to heal and recover.

The Sabbath commandment was not meant to be observed legalistically. That is the point of our gospel reading today. The Pharisees criticized Jesus and the disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath and criticized Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath day. Jesus' response was "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." To take a sabbath does not have to be a certain day of the week. I have to work Sundays. I wonder if we would not be a healthier and happier society if there was one day a week that all the stores and businesses were closed down, so that families could enjoy time together, and everyone would have a day off.

This sermon is just as much for me. I have not practiced what I am preaching this morning. As I look back at my forty years pastoring churches, perhaps one of my biggest mistakes was not having regular sabbath time. I do not know of any person who, on their death bed, said, I wished I would have worked more. As I end a forty-year calling, don't do what I did. Do what God wants you to do.

To the Lord our God, Alpha and Omega,
be all glory and honor forever. **Amen.**