

Last week's sermon was about keeping Sabbath time as individuals. But there's another aspect to Sabbath rest that is just as important. In Scripture God tells us that Sabbath isn't just for individuals. Sabbath is for animals and servants, too. Sabbath is for whole communities at once, too. And Sabbath is for the whole world. That Sabbath time isn't just one day a week. As we see in Leviticus, once every seventh year, the land is to rest for a year and the whole economic system is to take a break and have a Sabbath year. Then every 50 years, it is the Year of Jubilee – the year of restitution, of social equality, of liberty for all, and of simple living.

Every year when Earth Day rolls around, I often think that the earth needs a rest. We humans have been extracting minerals, damming up rivers, tearing up land, pumping waste into the air and water, and stuffing it with our trash. We call the earth Mother Earth, but I wonder if we treat it more like a slave – and even slaves were to get a Sabbath. Wayne Muller tells the story of a nun who lives at an Abbey in Mississippi. Her name is Sister Gilchrist. Like many nuns, she has a variety of responsibilities at the Abbey. Hers include growing herbs for use in the kitchen.

The sisters got interested in more sustainable and efficient farming methods. They were advised to change the grazing habits of their cattle. Rather than allowing them to roam freely over all the fields all the time, they were advised to pen the cattle in smaller area, whereby they could thoroughly graze and fertilize a smaller patch of land at a time. Periodically, they were told to move the pen and thereby give the rest of the field a rest. You know what happened – old herbs growing in the field were more vigorous, and new ones that had been mowed down by the cattle had a chance to grow. Even the grasses grew more vigorously, to the point that the sisters didn't have to buy grain to supplement the grass. How much the earth can heal itself – and do so rather quickly, if just given a chance to rest. (Wayne Muller, Sabbath: Finding, Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives. New York: Bantam Books, 1999, pg. 144)

I've also thought how good it would be for our country and our world, if one day a week, everyone took a break from the vitriol and acrimony that dominates so much of the airwaves, social media, and even everyday human interactions. Imagine what that would do to lessen anxiety, angst, and negativity that swirl around. Imagine how that would reduce the numbness that some people feel – a numbness that leads to isolation because people don't know who or what's safe. Imagine how that would help everyone relax, and smile more often.

There have been lots of studies done that suggest that time off for workers actually is good for business. That's hard to fathom, I know, partly because, when the economy is good, mandatory overtime is not unheard of. And it's also because, there's always the pressure to get projects done yesterday because there are more

projects in the pipeline. I saw one study that said that in 2012 American's left 9.2 paid vacation days per year on the table and never used them. I saw another study that say that "all of society benefits when people take time off" and organizations encourage that time off, because "people tend to return happier and more relaxed. Those good 'vibes' spread like a contagion to everyone you come in contact with." A study in Sweden found that summer is the happiest time of the year – why? because it's vacation time. And of course, people live longer and spend less on health care, including mental health care, when people take time off. Isn't it nice when studies and science serve to collaborate what the bible has been teaching us all along. Sabbaths make for good societies.

In researching this sermon, I ran across a TED Talk by a fellow by the name of Stefan Stagemester. He is president of Stagemester Studios in New York City. It is a music and design company. He closes down his business every 7 years for a full year. Why? because he has discovered that the ideas that come out of that one year off are very creative and give his business juice that lasts a full seven years. In other words everything that he does in the years between sabbaticals comes from that one year off. Long ago 3M instituted a practice know as the 15% rule – 15% of a persons work day or work week was fenced off and to be devoted by the employee to whatever personal project they want to pursue – a time to have fun with something and try without fear of consequences of failure. The result has been a steady stream of inventions. At Google it's not a 15% rule – it's a 20% rule. Think about it for yourself – how many times have you been pushing and pushing yourself through a project and you hit a wall. And yet, you keeping pushing and keep trying. But when you step away for a period of time, give it and you a rest, then go back to whatever it was that you were working on, suddenly the wall is gone and the whole thing flows again.

I remember way back when I first came here as pastor, you all had just finished working with an architect who had drawn up plans for the long hoped for fellowship hall. The architect even built a model. There was one problem – the estimated cost was out of sight – I'm remembering that it was \$1.2 million, that may not be the exact cost. So we gave the idea a rest – put it on the back burner for a bit, and went on to do other things. A few years later the idea was revived, this time the energy flowed. There were new ideas – even a new name for the project – no longer was it a fellowship hall, but it was to be a great room. There was a new architect, and a new set of plans, but no model, and the price tag was a lot less. The project went amazingly smoothly and we have the Great Room. Giving the project a few years of rest paid off wonderfully.

Long time ago, Dwight L. Moody said, "I believe that the Sabbath question today is vital one for the whole country. It is the burning question of the present time. If you give up Sabbath, the church goes; if you give up the church, the home goes; and if the home goes, the nation goes. That is the direction in which we are traveling." Moody died in 1899. Yet there is wisdom in his statement that has bearing on our collective lives today. The biblical truth is: Good Sabbaths for all make for good societies.

