

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
Lent Midweek Service – Rest  
March 16, 2022  
Rev. Debra Abbott

***Exodus 20:8-10***

*<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.*

***Matthew 11:28***

*<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

God created heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them and then God rested. God rested. Think about that for a moment.

How many times in your life have you felt that there was no time to rest from work. And yet from the very beginning of all things God did both work and rest. A time for rest is a part of the rhythm of life that God has given us.

Rest is so important to us as individuals and as a community that it is commanded by God as we heard in our reading today from Exodus 20.

And yet this commandment to keep the sabbath is one that Christians struggle with. Sometimes we even proudly break it, believing that our work and our busy schedules are where we find our own value and identity.

As an adult I have always struggled with the command to keep the sabbath, to rest. So I’m going to turn to someone who practiced sabbath and encouraged his community of faith to do the same.

In an open letter to his congregation called, “Why Your Pastor Wants You to Keep a Sabbath” Eugene Peterson reflects on the commandment to keep the sabbath.<sup>i</sup>

This letter was written several decades ago but could have been written today. Here is an excerpt:

*“Odd, isn’t it? We have more leisure hours per person per year as a country than anyone could have guessed a hundred years ago. But we are not leisurely. We are not relaxed. We are anxious. We are in a hurry. The anxiety and the hurry ruin intimacy and sabotage our best intentions in faith, hope, and love—the three actions in which most of us set out to do our best.”*

*“That is why I as your pastor want you to keep a Sabbath. I want you to live well. I want you to live whole and mature, with appreciation and pleasure, experiencing the heights and depths of God’s glory in your bodies and your work, your friends and your gardens, your minds and your emotions, at the ocean and in the mountains. You can’t do that if you are ‘on the run.’ You can’t do that if you are watching the clock.”*

*“Sabbath is the biblical tool for protecting time against desecration. It is the rhythmic setting apart of one day each week for praying and playing—the two activities for which we don’t get paid, but which are necessary for a blessed life. A blessed life is what we are biblically promised. A blessed life is not a mere survival life, but a bountiful life. Praying and playing are warp and woof in the bounty.”*

*“Keeping a Sabbath is simple and easy: We pray and we play, two things we were pretty good at as children, and can always pick up again with a little encouragement and if we can only find the time. But we don’t have to find the time, it is given to us. A day a week. A Sabbath. A day to pray and play. God’s gift.”*

Do you agree with Pastor Peterson that “keeping a sabbath is simple and easy?” Maybe today you don’t find it easy at all. Maybe you have to work 7 days a week to make enough money to pay your bills. Or you have loved ones that need care each day that requires you to work. Or you have never been given permission to stop and rest, pray and play.

As in all things that are new for us, we have to practice rest in order to live into the way of sabbath keeping so that it will become a part of our daily life.

Sabbath keeping and rest are gifts that God gives to us. Just as God created you to be unique and beautiful, God wants you to find ways to rest that are unique and beautiful.

As we rediscover spiritual disciplines during this Lenten season, we are invited this week to practice rest.

Rest and sabbath keeping look different for each one of us.

So how do you rest? Taking time to rest our bodies, minds and spirits looks different for each one of us. Maybe rest for you is found in sleep or hiking or daydreaming.

Pastor Peterson practiced sabbath keeping by praying and playing. He found that in silence and time set aside for prayer he was made aware of God's presence and God's voice and God at work.

Last week we focused on prayer as one of our spiritual disciplines. But what about play? How might play be a part of our sabbath keeping? What are things you like to do that you don't get paid for or don't have to do? Drawing, music, playing games, reading...play is different for all of us.

Today and this week and this season, I hope you reflect on what sabbath keeping and rest mean for you. And consider ways that you can pray and play for a portion of each week.

And if you are thinking to yourself, I can't rest or I don't know how to begin, let's start with Jesus' words for us. Let's start by resting our worries and our fears and our spirits in Jesus. Jesus who says to you and to me, *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

May God, our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit grant you rest this day and guide you in the practice and discipline of sabbath keeping this week.  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *"Confessions of a Former Sabbath Breaker"* by Eugene H. Peterson, Christianity Today, September 2, 1988