

“Radical Sabbath”
July 7, 2019
St. Paul’s UCC Church
Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Leviticus 25:2-4

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.'

Welcome to the fourth week of our summer series on the Ten Commandments! For ten weeks, we will focus on each one of the Ten Commandments – Ten Gifts, Ten Promises. I will preach on these commandments; but not only that, I will interpret the commandments musically as well! The Music of the Ten Commandments.

Today, we are looking at the fourth commandment “Observe the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.”

You might have been taught growing up that this means that one day a week (Sunday, in our case) should be reserved for worship and Bible Study. This is not a bad start to what this law is about – nothing in the world wrong with worship and Bible Study!! – but I think this law is even deeper, even more radical, than we tend to give it credit for.

Here is the commandment, in its fullness. Listen carefully: “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” And then, from Leviticus 25: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years

sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.”

Did you hear that? This commandment is not only made for us; it is also made for our children, for our employees, for our animals. It is not only made for us; it is also made for the “resident alien” – the immigrant, the refugee, the foreigner – living near you. And, as Leviticus tells us, the Sabbath is not only made for us; it is also made for the land, for the whole creation: “But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD...”

This is so radical, people of God! Through this commandment, God is breaking in into the whole economic and political situation of our world. Sabbath is an intrusion into “life as usual.” God knows how greedy we can be – that hasn’t changed in thirty-five hundred years – and God is saying, “Stop. Stop. Stop your frantic need to work and produce and make a profit. Stop this mad activity for your own sake, but not only that, stop it for the sake of the people who work for you, and for your children, and for your animals, and for the refugee, and for the earth.”

We live in an overheated 24/7 kind of world. We live in a world with little to no boundaries. A lot of people who work feel like they are at the beck and call of their employers. It’s devastating to feel like you are trapped like this. So here is God, interrupting all that, giving us a very tangible way to care for each other, including caring for the earth.

God yearns for us to slow down, to stop the greed. But God understands how hard it is to get through to us, so God reminds us that we were once slaves. More than that: I think God *pleads* with us to remember that we, too, were once slaves. Maybe that will help us remember what it was like. Maybe that will give us a little compassion. Maybe that will help us stop all the madness – not just for us, but for all of creation.

Think back to when you were a slave
24/7 you had to behave
Working for the man, with one foot in the grave
How did it feel then, in your soul?
The Pharaoh did more than just take a toll, he said:
Your body didn’t matter. How could you be whole?
How could you be whole?
Woa...

Don’t dare tell me that you forgot
Don’t give me that, don’t change the plot
You nearly died there, ‘neath the rust and rot
He stole you, and sold you, your people, too
He hung you and shot you, you know that it’s true, he said:
Your life didn’t matter, so you thought you were through
You could have sworn you were through
Woa....

And now, clear your eyes: it's happen' again
But this time it's you who won't make it end
This time it's you who refuses to bend
Ignoring your body, forgetting your breath
Straining your soul with martinis and meth
Killing your neighbor. It's just another Black Death.
It's just another Black Death:

Is it greed, is it greed that drives you?
Is it fear, is it fear that rides you?
Do you not hear Me breathe beside you? Oh...
Now I tell you that rest will find you
You're released from the rage that binds you
Love will lead you and go behind you
'Cause I knew you....

Way back then, back when you were a slave
24/7, when you had to behave
Did you not see me, rising up from your grave?
I knew who you were then, I knew your name
I saw you sweatin', I saw your pain
I said your life mattered. Now you go do the same.
You better go do the same.

Honoring the Sabbath is a justice issue: it's a right extended to every single human being, not to mention the whole world! Sabbath-keeping, in other words, is a radical invitation for life for *all* of creation.

There's something else so very radical about this commandment. When this commandment tells us to *stop*: to stop our wild activity, to stop our working, our striving, to stop it, it is also reminding us that, *gulp*, we are not in control. This commandment makes the radical claim that *this world can go on without us*. Argh! What a terrible, and scary, and – if we let it work on us – *liberating* thought.

I don't know about you, but I often go and go and work and work and strive and strive because I have this really messed-up, sinful belief that this world desperately needs me. That things just won't be as good without my input. Well, says God in this commandment, that's not really true.

This commandment is a holy reminder that, because *God* is in charge, we don't need to run the show; so it's okay – it's more than okay, it's actually commanded – to take a break now and then. For goodness sakes, even God rested one out of those seven days of creation! So what makes me think I need to work harder than God?? What makes me think I am so important?

Did you say, did you say this world goes on without me? (What? What?)

*Not okay! Not okay! Not okay! How can that be? (What? What?)
When I do so much, I add so much, I work so much, I give so much...
Constantly?*

You say: take a break now. Take a load off. But how?
You say: Let it go now. You can rest, now. But how?

Chorus

You say, have some fun, now. Let loose, now. But how?
You say, trust the others. They can do it. But how?

How can they do it? How can they do it?
When I've always done it, I've always done it?
How can I let go? O God, can you show me the way...?

*When you say, when you say this world goes on without me? (Yeah? Yeah?)
It's okay! It's okay! It's okay! I'll let it be. (Yeah! Yeah!)
When I don't do so much, or add so much, or work so much, or give so much...
Maybe I'll be free...!*

There is a beautiful invitation in this commandment. An invitation to be free of all our striving and working and helping and going. At least for a day. In this commandment is the invitation to trust that God is taking care of what needs to be taken care of. In this commandment is the invitation for deep rest.

*Rest in me, trust in me
I'll sing you sweet lullabies to soothe you to sleep
Rest in me, trust in me
And I will take care of you, you'll see*

I know how you strive so
I know you work hard
But you can loosen your grip now
You can let down your guard

Chorus

Sweet one, you're a child now
Be still on my breast
I love you, I feed you
I call you to rest

Thanks be to God!