

Rest - 31st July 2022

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Date: 31 July 2022

Preacher: Ruth Edmonds

[0 : 00] So before we start, I just want to say, Fung Yang to the people at the back. How wonderful to see you. It is our privilege as a church to welcome you. I cannot imagine how hard it would be to flee your country and make a home elsewhere.

And we are so pleased you have chosen to make your home with us. So welcome. Thank you. So, last week Dave talked to you about waiting.

Today I'm going to talk about something related but slightly different, which is resting. Now, in our society, there is enormous pressure to feel busy, to present yourself as busy.

The busy people are the important people. It's important to feel like you're doing something useful and like you've achieved something all the time. Working through your day off can seem like an accolade.

And I must confess that this was written on my day off, so this is a sermon to me as much as it is to you. I'm not looking for congratulations. But even when we do have time off, we can feel like we have to prove that we've done something with it.

[1 : 16] And I don't think social media really helps with this. Sometimes when you're on holiday, it's necessary to prove how exciting all the places you've been to are. Did you get that perfect selfie?

How much did you do? And how happy were you? Was it 100% joy or vocation? Because that's the only thing that's acceptable in this day and age. And I guess for many people, as Brene Brown says, for me and for many of us, our first waking thought in the day is, I didn't get enough sleep. How many people would say that's true? And then the next thought is, I don't have enough time to get all the things done that I need to get done. Whether true or not, that thought occurs enough to us automatically before we even question it or examine it.

We spend most of the days and hours of our week worrying about what we don't have enough of before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor.

We're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds are racing with a litany of things that we did not get done that day.

[2 : 32] We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack. I didn't get enough sleep. I haven't got enough time. In this culture and context, to rest, to stop doing, to stop producing, to stop achieving, to stop showing other people what you're doing, is really subversive.

It's counter-cultural. It's a liberation from the slavery of production and scarcity. We stay late at work. We take on more projects than we have time for.

We overspend the money that we have to seek to conform to unrealistic expectations and standards, all in an effort to prove our worthiness in a culture that places our value on the amount of money we make, on the kind of house that we live in, on the make and model of our cars and the brand of our clothing.

We all become stressed out and anxious people, trying to prove to ourselves and to other people that we are enough. The very thought of taking one day, one day of intentional rest a week amid that mindset is panic-inducing.

How will I get it all done? I need this time. I need to spread out everything. It's impossible to take a day away because I'm already so behind. We have fallen into this scenario where we hold ourselves captive to our own lack of worthiness.

[3 : 58] And yet today, we're going to be reflecting on the creation story in Genesis, a creation story I'm sure you all know really well. You know, the one where the universe is designed by God with one day in seven to be kept for rest.

A completely alien concept even to the society it was born in, a completely alien concept today. So let's turn to the Bible. This is Genesis 1 and 2.

I'm currently reading from the voice translation, which is my current preferred translation, but it does vary week by week. In the beginning, God created everything, the heavens above and the earth below.

Here's what happened. At first, the earth lacked shape and everything was totally empty and a dark fog draped over the deep while God's spirit hovered over the surface of the empty waters.

Then there was the voice of God. And God said, let there be light. And light flashed into being. And God saw that the light was beautiful and good. And he separated the light from the darkness and named the light day and the darkness night.

[5 : 09] Evening gave way to morning. That was the first day. God said, let there be a vast expanse in the middle of the waters. Let the waters above part from the waters below.

So God parted the waters and formed this expanse, separating the waters above from the waters below. And it happened just as God said. And God called the vast expanse above sky.

Evening gave way to morning. That was the second day. God said, let the waters below the heavens be collected into one place and congregate into a vast sea so that dry land can appear.

And it happened just as God said. God called the dry land earth and the waters congregated below seas. And God saw that his new creation was beautiful and good.

God said to the earth, sprout green vegetation, grow all varieties of seed bearing crops and all sorts of fruit bearing trees. And it happened just as God said.

[6 : 10] The earth produced vegetation, seed bearing plants of all varieties, fruit bearing trees of all sorts. And God saw that his new creation was beautiful and good. Evening gave way to morning.

That was the third day. Then God said, lights come out, shine in the vast expanse of heaven's sky, dividing day from night to mark the seasons, days and years.

Lights warm the earth with your light. And it happened just as God said. God fashioned two great lights, the brighter to mark the course of the day, the dimmer to mark the course of the night, and the divine needled night with the stars.

God set them in the heaven sky to cast warm light on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that his new creation was beautiful and good.

Evening gave way to morning. That was the fourth day. Then God said, waters swarm with fish and sea creatures. Let birds soar high above the earth in the broad expanse of the sky.

[7 : 13] So God created huge sea creatures, all the swarm of life in the waters, and every species of flying birds, each able to reproduce its own kind.

And God saw that his new creation was beautiful and good. And God spoke his blessing over them. He said, be fruitful and multiply. Let creatures fill the seas.

Let birds reproduce and cover the entire earth. Evening gave way to morning. That was the fifth day. Then God said, earth generate life. Produce a vast variety of living creatures, domesticated animals, small creeping creatures, and wild animals that roam the earth.

And it happened just as God said. God made earth creatures in a vast variety of species. Wild animals, domestic animals of all kinds, small creeping creatures, each able to reproduce its own kind.

And God saw that his creation was beautiful and good. And God paused. Then God said, now let us conceive a new creation, humanity, made in our image, fashioned according to our likeness.

[8 : 21] And let us, God, grant them authority over all the earth, the fish in the sea and the birds in the earth, the domesticated animals and the small creeping animals on the earth. So God did just that.

God created humanity in God's image, created them male and female. Then God blessed them and gave them this directive. Be fruitful and multiply. Populate the earth.

I make you trustees of my world so care for my creation and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and every creature that roams across the earth. And he says to humanity, look, I've given you every seed-bearing plant that grows on earth, every fruit-bearing tree, they will be your nourishment.

And as for the wild animals, the birds in the sky and every small creeping creature that breathes the breath of life, I've given them all the green plants for food. So if you don't want to eat your greens, God said it first.

That's not from the Bible. And it happened just as God said. Then God surveyed everything that he had made, savouring its beauty and appreciating its goodness.

[9 : 24] Evening, wake, wake, and morning. That was day six. So now you see how the creation swept into being the spangled heavens, the earth, and their hosts in six days. And on the seventh day, with the canvas of the cosmos completed, God paused from his labor and God rested.

Thus God blessed day seven and made it special an open time for pause and restoration, a sacred time of Sabbath keeping because God rested from all the work he had done in creation on that day. So I guess from that you can see that God's rest on the seventh day is a model for the kind of Sabbath rest that God wants for all God's people.

However much you can achieve in day six, and we have this picture of God doing all that in six days, day seven is sacred. If he kept working, I'm sure he could have done more.

But he says, no, there should be rest. Now for our fellow Hong Kong members, here is that same passage with a bit of illustration in Cantonese. living space here in the book of Niserach this book Joep in the second video, they express Hillary singing technologies.

[10 : 33] Meanwhile, it suggests that Moses was a coercion nazi maneuver in Turkey from the era. The death of God, was there an optimism, which became a healing lively community. God created by dankness seemed called Adam.

After slamming by somebody's eyes and faces from the thoughts he thought that the collapse and to show your power by implementing the modern world and Él cuestión This tool, pat guided by well, through Brook side, master, make their own lle cancelled.

Holy invitation is such a Saint ohh made up their own with its ability selves andimmung has 100% of them, and to tell to our happenings and purity of the world, Traditionally, Michelle Fuller interprets us for Nelson Booker.

However, when the solarες or possessions in etcetera, does all percent shake Him going on? Think about the reason God loves the soul.

This uncertainty is highly foothold. If something is a spiritual exchange, then we can only accept the in the Spirit. These metrics sign up to Dasa good anak idiota I dearly, dearly hope that that was the right passage.

[12 : 08] Now, that was a really counter-cultural story at the time, not least because it was one of the first visions of a god deliberately creating the world and deciding that it was good.

I mean, for example, the Babylonian myth had this really horrifying war between these kind of big creatures and then the earth kind of sprung up as the debris kind of caught life. So it's a very different image to that.

We're not a side effect of a spiritual battle. Instead, God created carefully. But actually, the bit that monocultures had most problem with was the idea that God rested.

When this passage was first translated into ancient Greek by the 70 scholars who translated the Septic Inc, they actually apparently deliberately mistranslated it because they believed that a literal translation would just be completely unintelligible in ancient Greek.

So instead of these, they changed the phrase, on the seventh day, God rested, to on the seventh day, God finished all the work that he had made. Why was it thought that the ancient Greeks would not understand about rest?

[13 : 15] Well, how did the idea that God made the universe in six days rather than seven seem so much more puzzling? It seems puzzling, but the answer is simple. The ancient Greeks could not understand the seventh day, the idea of resting for a whole day as part of the work of creation.

After all, they said, what is creative about resting? By not making, not working, not inventing. That idea seemed to make no sense in that culture at all. Indeed, one of the things that the ancient Greeks traditionally ridiculed the Jews for was the Sabbath.

One day in seventh, the Jews do no work, they said, because they are lazy. The idea that the day might have had any value at all was apparently beyond their comprehension. Oddly enough, within a very short period of time, the ancient Greek empire began to crumble.

Just as the earlier city-state of Athens had, which gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers and writers in history. After all, civilizations like ancient Greece, even ones as big and important as ancient Greece, can burn out.

It's what happens if you don't have a day of rest written into your schedule. The idea is that resting one day in seven and you won't. And the Sabbath isn't just about not burning out so that you can go

on and do more work.

[14:33] Instead, it's about staying in touch with that sacred inner part of us that's made in the image of God. The loving, connective, connected part. What Sabbath did, and still does, having a day off, is to create space in our lives and in society as a whole in which we are truly free.

Free from the pressures of work. Free from the demands of ruthless employers. Free from the siren calls of a society urging us to spend our way to happiness.

Free from the need to prove yourself. Free to be ourselves in the company of those we love most. In Moses' day, it even meant freedom from slavery under the Pharaoh.

And in the 19th and 20th century, it meant freedom from the sweatshop working conditions of long hours and little pay. In hours, perhaps we can make it mean freedom from emails.

Freedom from smartphones. Freedom from the demands of 24-7 availability. Stopping for one day, the idea of Sabbath is an idea of utopia now.

[15:42] Because on it, we create for 24 hours a week a world in which there are no hierarchies. No employers and employees. No buyers and sellers. No inequalities of wealth or power.

No production. No traffic. No din of the factory or clamor of the marketplace. No ding of the smartphone. It is meant, at its purest form, to be the still point in a turning world.

A pause between huge symphonic movements in life. A break between the chapters of our days.

The equivalent of time in the open countryside between towns where you can hear the breeze.

And the birds, songs of the birds. Sabbath is utopia not as it will be at the end of time. But perhaps we can see it as a chance to practice for what heaven on earth will look like.

Now, in the middle of time. God wanted the Israelites to begin their one day in seven rehearsal of freedom as soon as they left Egypt. Because real freedom, the kind that we anticipate in heaven, the kind that God is bringing to happen on earth, the seven days in seven day kind of freedom, takes time.

[16:54] It takes centuries, millennia. Freedom has to be learnt and practised to creep into your soul so completely that you remember the rest of the week that no matter what the worldly powers and hierarchies and social pressures you encounter, you are free and you are made in the image of God to be free.

The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between things that are important and things that are just urgent.

What has to happen now and what's actually a massive priority. Under pressure, the things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often the things that make the most difference to our happiness and to the sense of a life well lived.

And I guess the way that traditional Jewish people practice it, Sabbath is a time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent. Dedicated to friendship, community, to a sense of holiness, prayer and relationship with God, family and Bible reading.

In which we retell the long and dramatic story of our faith and our journey and the love song that God is singing over the world. Taking one day out a week gives us time to celebrate peace.

[18:09] The peace that comes from love. This is a beauty not created by one of the great artists but by each of us. A serene island in time. In the midst of an often raging sea of the rest of the world.

So in many ways, to see the story of God in the world is only possible when you stop and take time to see the beauty of now. There is a Jewish phrase that you lose half your ability to see what's really there during the busyness of the week.

And that your sight only returns fully when Sabbath starts with the taste of wine and the bright glow of candles. Because slowing down, focusing on God and family, enables us to see the world with renewed eyes.

With perspective and clarity and wisdom which can be lost in the rest of our lives. And there's a deep spiritual truth there, isn't there? To remember your first love, God.

To love those God has given you to love takes time. Takes rest. Takes a moment out. Stopping or slowing down teaches us to truly appreciate the wonder of our world.

[19:19] To savour the pleasures created for us with so much divine love. To grasp the power and the beauty of our most precious relationships. To feel the divine gift of life itself.

It's the day when we're able to taste the sweetness of this world and celebrate it fully through the power of appreciation. The gateway to happiness. So what does this look like in life?

I mean, I can't imagine many of you turning all your electric equipment off for one day a week. All of it. I can't imagine any of you doing that.

But I think, how do we practice this in practice? I think it means remembering that often love is spelt time. That you do need to put time in with God and with each other.

To remember why you're lovable. That you love God. And that there is beauty and freshness in the world. Because sometimes when everything's coming at you, you can't see any of it. To connect and love your loved ones well.

[20 : 18] I think this means to be a human properly. To be a human who's free and can see clearly and love well. Well, I think that probably takes an hour a day. An hour a day where you're not doing the cooking or the washing up.

Or at least half an hour a day where you're just focusing on God and loved ones. Ideally a day a week where you're not doing chores. You're not cooking Sunday lunch.

You aren't sorting out the house or rushing from event to event. And I guess as society we're so bad at that. That to top it up. Because we aren't good at taking that kind of free time.

That kind of unstructured time. I think possibly a weekend a quarter. For all those Saturdays where realistically you do spend the time rushing from event to event. And if you're gasping for your holidays.

Like I am a little bit right now. Then you need more time. And it may seem impossible with all the pressures of the world. But this is one of the things that we need to be human.

[21 : 17] And it's one of the divine commands of our God. The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of creation. They ridiculed a God who rested. Yet it is so.

For without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul. And a renewal of our bonds of identity and love. All creative ideas within us eventually wither and die. But the way around this is to take time out.

Especially a day a week. That's humanity's greatest source of renewable energy. A day that gives us the strength to keep on creating. As God modeled for us.

Not because God had limits. But because God knew that we did. To stop doing and start becoming the people God called us to be. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.