

Take a break.

Psalm 81: 1-10

Mark 2:23-3:6

Have you ever caught yourself wishing for more hours in the day or more days in the week so that you could finally catch up and finish everything that you are supposed to do?

Modern technology promised us that all of the new conveniences would save us time and make our lives easier, but in the workplace, computers, tablets and phones have increased the pace of our work rather than reducing it.

At home dishwashers, washing machines, vacuums and microwaves have made life easier. According to Parkinson's law, work expands to fill the time available for its completion.

And so, mothers lose the time they saved. Now, they find themselves taking the kids to karate, music and school activities. Even children are stressed out because so much of their time is scheduled and there is so little time to just be a child, playing and allowing their imaginations to run wild. I don't think that parents can take all the blame, as peer pressure plays its part too.

Perhaps the pandemic has given us an opportunity to consider our priorities. It is a never-ending circle that seems to escalate over time until finally, there is no more time. The Sabbath, a day of rest seems to be archaic today.

You might be thinking "Well, that was fine for back then when people didn't have as much to do, as far to go, but not for this day and age. You see, we need every hour of every day and every day of the week to get done what we have to get done."

Really? Please remember one cardinal rule of life, "You do, what you want to do." The fourth commandment was not given just for the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, and it wasn't just given for Jesus and his disciples and it wasn't just given for your grandparents, the fourth commandment is as valid today as it was 30 years ago, 200 years ago, 2000 years ago or 4000 years ago.

God didn't just give it to annoy people, or to mess up their plans for the weekend.

He did it because he knew what we are like. He knew that if he didn't legislate a time out in our lives, then we wouldn't take one. A tree has to take a break, it can't say, "you know I really should produce leaves all year round and fruit in January when it's cold and miserable."

A hedgehog doesn't choose to hibernate or not hibernate. Nature has no choice it must take a break because that's the way it was created. But people are different, we have our freedom and that is the problem. We can drive our bodies, minds and emotions well past the breaking point.

We have the power of choice and because of that power we are always in danger of destroying ourselves for some false set of values.

It might be work, it might be appearance, it might be the desire to be the perfect parent but, in a combination, it provides a deadly cocktail for burn out.

Because of this great hazard, God gave us a great gift, the Sabbath day, a day set apart, the Lord's Day, a day of rest and worship, relaxation, recuperation and joy. It is his gift to all of us, but it's up to each one of us to decide whether or not we will accept it.

The fourth commandment is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated anywhere in the New Testament. Each of the other nine commandments are reiterated and often made even tougher in the New Testament, but not this one.

There is no record of Jesus ever teaching anyone to keep the Sabbath. As far as we know, no apostle ever told anyone to observe it. In John 5:18 we are told that Jesus violated the Sabbath and in other stories we almost get the impression that he did so very deliberately.

But if the letter of the law, the seventh day Sabbath is not applicable to us today, certainly the principle of the Sabbath still is. Because it is grounded in the nature of God, in the nature of man and in the nature of creation.

That principle is that a specific and proportionate amount of time be set apart for rest and worship. That principle was not first laid down in the book of Exodus but in the book of Genesis, which tells how God himself rested after six days of creative labour.

And even before the Commandments were given, earlier in the book of Exodus when God provide manna for the Israelites to eat, he told them to gather a double portion on the sixth day, so they wouldn't have to collect it on the seventh day.

And so, the first thing we need to discover about the Sabbath is that It Is a Day of Rest.

We live in a tired generation, and it's not necessarily some new phenomenon.

Listen to what Robert Louis Stevenson wrote over a hundred years ago "Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business is only to be sustained by neglect of many other things."

The rest that God commands us to take allows us to step back from the arena of life and evaluate exactly what it is we are trying to achieve. Even from a purely physical perspective it has been proven that people cannot go on indefinitely without things starting to go wrong with their bodies, their minds and their emotions. I wonder what would happen to the mental health business if we just slowed down. God is basically telling us in the fourth commandment, "Take a break".

But it's not just a day of rest; It is a Day of Reflection. Not only does God call us to rest on a special day but he also calls us to Reflect on that day as well.

It's good to stop and reflect on what God has done and to give thanks.

To gather with God's people and celebrate his goodness. To pause and give a little back to God, our time our money our talents. People say, "well I can do that without going to church." Sure, but do you?

When people do whatever it is that people do on Sunday morning, do they really give time to God?

Sunday is a day for God's people to get together and to reflect and celebrate what He has done for us. We do that by singing his praise, by reading and hearing from his word, by lifting up his name in prayer and by giving to his work.

Throughout history the observance of the Sabbath or of the Lord's Day has inspired two extremes.

People have found ways to misuse this gift just as they've found ways to misuse the other gifts that God has given us. The first extreme are those people who have historically made Sunday into a day of gloom and depression instead of a day of joy and gladness. This is what had happened in Jesus' day.

We aren't going to do the fourth commandment any favours when we turn it into something like "Thou shalt not enjoy life on Sunday." Many people mean well, but we cannot make people, especially children; enjoy God by forbidding them to enjoy anything else on Sunday. Such a rigid observance of Sunday can become just as idolatrous today as it was in Jesus' day and that is what he was warning us about.

But usually today that's not our problem, is it? Our problem today is probably the opposite extreme; we take a holy day and turn it into a holiday, a day of commercialized recreation, entertainment and profit.

It is a Time of Refreshment. The bible tells us that God called the first six days "good", but the seventh day God called Holy. And it is intended as more than just a day of fun or rest. Within that day represents one seventh of our week and ultimately one seventh of our life. And when we slow down and rest and reflect on the goodness of God, it allows us a time of refreshing. It recharges our batteries.

There are those who say they don't need to go to church to meet with God, and some people try to rationalize that a Sabbath spent golfing, shopping or going to the beach as fulfilling the spirit of the Sabbath.

Exodus 31:17. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and was refreshed.

Think about it, God stopped working and was refreshed. So, what happens when we make the decision to slow down and stop working, not hitting the stop button, but just hitting the pause button for a period of time.

You see, the day of rest shouldn't end when we walk out the door of the church. "Well, now I've done my duty and now I can get on with life." The Sabbath wasn't an hour it was a day. And if nothing else when we pause and reflect it will give us a new perspective on the rest of our days. It was Leonardo da Vinci who said "Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer.

Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller and more of it can be taken in at a glance and a lack of harmony and proportion is more readily seen."

So, what can we do on Sunday or what should we do? Good question

How about: Using it for family time (and family time is not watching your kids play organized sports, it's not sitting in the living room with everyone on their own laptop, it's not zoned out in front of the TV). Do you remember Sunday Dinners, not that they were necessarily relaxing especially for the cook, but why not make Sunday dinner a special time and an easy time, soup and sandwiches instead of a roast beef dinner?

I know it's tough but try to make it a relaxing time, just try sitting back and doing nothing, close your eyes and take a break (Although not specified in the Scripture, a wee Holy nap is certainly a divine gift.)

We've mentioned it before, but take time for Church, come together with other believers to celebrate God! And take some time for conversation with God.

Amen.