



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

“An Invitation to Rest”
Mark 6:30-31

Rev. David K. Groth

July 21-22, 2012
8th Sunday of Pentecost

Collect of the Day

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest’” (Mark 6:30-31).

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8).

A friend once suggested that one of Wisconsin’s best kept secrets are the roads that begin with letters, the county roads. . . SC and CW and M and the like. “You see things” he said, “that you cannot see speeding down the interstate.” You see more and appreciate more when you slow down a little.

It’s true also in the woods. Usually when I go hiking I take Benno the dog with me. We go at a pretty good clip, him to explore the next thing, and I to keep up with him. I never see much wildlife that way. As we come crashing down the trails, every living thing flees for dear life. Once in a while, however, I’ll go alone, and I’ll go very slowly and sometimes just stand still and watch and listen. It’s remarkable how much more

one sees that way.

It's true also of life. If we slow down a bit, if we rest and honor Sabbath rest, we experience more life actually, not less. You see more and appreciate more when you slow down, things you cannot see speeding down the interstate, or crashing through the woods or racing through life. The trouble is, life today isn't conducive toward slowing down, is it, or to Sabbath rest.

Some time ago the newspaper featured an article on what international investment banking looks like these days. As you know, there's instant access to trading information that is happening around the world. Computers carefully monitor the trades being made in real time. Investment bankers in London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Tokyo, Sydney, Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul, they are all watching the same information. It is a never-ending day in which the market never closes. If you are in New York or Chicago or LA and if you or your system or your associates are not working, not monitoring around the clock, you lose. So every time you rest, every vacation you take, every sick day you use, you are losing. That to me, sounds like a man-made version of hell.

Of course, it's not just with investment bankers. Sociologists say our days are faster and fuller than ever before. The pace of life is accelerating. It is faster this year than it was last and significantly faster than it was a decade or two ago. Life is proceeding at a pace far too fast for the health and comfort of those that live it. Our technology allows us to live and move and have our being in never-ending daylight, in a marketplace that never closes. And here comes religion with a quaint and eccentric notion of Sabbath -- a rest -- a time of quiet and restoration. It's at odds with our culture.

Even suggesting Sabbath rest to some of you makes me feel antiquated and out of place like a horse and buggy on I-94.

Yet it's at the heart of our religion. This is not some peripheral topic. It's already there is the very beginning of the Bible. "In the Beginning . . . God . . ." an astonishing affirmation of faith. And then follows the gorgeous sweeping account of creation. On the sixth day God steps back and takes in the whole project and "indeed, it was very good. . ." And on the seventh day "God rested and blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."

In Exodus keeping Sabbath becomes a command, though we do well to think of it as an invitation. "Six days you shall work. The seventh day you shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord your God." It's about rest, but it's also about your identity, who you are.

When the people of Israel were in Babylon, for instance, there was nothing in Babylonian culture that would remind them of their identity as God's people. So they were at risk of being fully absorbed and assimilated by the dominant culture of Babylon. Today, there's really nothing left out that in our culture that would remind you you are a baptized child of God. You are at risk then of being fully assimilated and absorbed by the dominant culture, a post Christian culture. So the command to rest, the command to Sabbath, is in part to remind you of who you are. Sabbath rest and worship is an act that announces faith in God and rejection of all other gods and religions. It's a day set aside for gathering around his Word. It's a day to disengage the wheels from work. If God was confident enough that he could rest . . . we can also rest on the Sabbath. Sabbath rest is an assertion that life

does not depend on our feverish activity. There can be a pause in which life is given us simply as a gift, a gift where the Lord restores us with His presence in Word and Sacrament, a gift where he refreshes us with a holy rest.

“Come away with me to a quiet place” Jesus says in our text, “and rest a while. For so many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” So they got into a boat and headed for a desolate place by themselves. But as they went, the crowd followed them along the shore line and ran ahead, and when the disciples eventually came ashore, the crowd was already there. Jesus had compassion on them and began teaching and serving them. So this time, it didn’t work. But that doesn’t neutralize the need for rest, nor the invitation to it.

“Come away with me to a quiet place and rest a while.” I submit we need restorative rest as much today, even though we doubt we have time for it. And I submit you do have control over your own lives. You are not slaves. You can say no. You don’t have to shop on Sundays if you don’t want to. And you really don’t have to clean house or pay the bills either. It might complicate things a bit, but you just might find it delightful. You can take time to worship and relax, and you should, for your own health and sanity and for your family’s health and sanity as well.

Now, if I know my people, some of you are thinking, “Well that’s all very nice, pastor, but that’s not the real world. In the real world, you have a boss to whom you must answer. In the real world, if you’re not willing to work when they call on you, you lose your work.”

Let me tell you what I know about the real world. In the real world I know, nobody on their death bed

says, “Pastor, I wish I would have spent more time in the office.” No, sometimes the people I see have very real regrets and guilt about how they used their days. In the real world I know, marriages struggle and sometimes fail when one spouse doesn’t do much of anything but work or think about work. In the real world I know, children grow up resenting dads or moms who are never around. Families become fractured, and later, reunions are tense and forced. In the real world I know, children need quantity time, not just a little quality time here and there to make ourselves feel better. In the real world I know older adults are sometimes alone and lonely because they never really took the time to cultivate friendships. In the real world I know, days pass, years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles because we don’t slow down enough to see and enjoy and give thanks for them. In the real world I know, the stress and the pressure builds up inside and it has to be relieved one way or another, and if it’s not relieved by rest and relaxation (which can include vigorous exercise), then it will come out in unhealthy ways -- temper explosions, addictions, affairs, depression, abuse, heart disease. Please -- don’t dismiss Sabbath rest by saying, “that’s nice, but it’s not the real world . . .” This command, this invitation to rest is for real people who live in the real world.

Life has a way of gouging holes out of us. The grind of work. Interpersonal problems. Financial stress. Marital stress. The stress of parenting. Health issues. Grief. Loneliness. Life has a way of gouging holes out of us. On the Sabbath, with His Word and Sacraments, and with the rest he invites us to, Christ goes into those holes and fills them with grace. It’s a timeout from the daily contest. The boxing bell rings

and you go to your corner, where somebody dabs mercy on your beat up life.

Finally, it's a matter of grace and faith, a matter of acknowledging the world does not depend on you or your feverish activity, that you cannot make the grain grow, or the sun rise or the birds sing or the flowers bloom. No one is indispensable. If you don't believe that, just try dying some day. Someone will be doing your work in no time at all. No one is indispensable. Besides, there is in and behind all things a steady, creative, sustaining grace. Great work is done, even while you are asleep.

So then, for your own health and happiness, receive anew this ancient gift of Sabbath rest. Give God the time he needs to feed you with his Word and nourish and restore you with his Supper, to fill the holes in your life with his grace and to poke some holes into your darkness with his light. "Come away with me to a quiet place and get some rest." Amen.

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.goodshepherdwi.org

1611 East Main Street

Watertown, WI 53094