

Rest to Prepare

Have you ever received a word of encouragement from someone, or a word you felt came from God and it chafed and irritated you? That happened to me this past Lent season. One week during a Lent service we were given a slip of paper and a pencil and asked to write down the word we thought God was giving us. Mine was ‘REST’. I do not like that word. For one reason, I, and we, have grown up in a culture where what we do and how we perform is how our value is measured, rest is only for the weak. Another reason I do not like the word, I think, is because I do not understand what true REST looks like. My first reaction to REST, is: am I getting enough sleep? Sometimes I am, and yet I still do not feel rested.

Shortly after this, my niece shared an article about REST, “5 Questions to Ask Yourself if You’re Not Getting Enough Rest” from Tend & Mend (tendmend.com). The author of this blog, Kylie, defines REST this way: *the intentional ceasing or slowing of striving, making, producing, working. Making space for being with (yourself and others): enjoying, delighting, playing, relishing, reflecting, remembering, dreaming.* Let me repeat that: *the intentional ceasing or slowing of striving, making, producing, working. Making space for being with (yourself and others): enjoying, delighting, playing, relishing, reflecting, remembering, dreaming.* This kind of REST is more than just sleep, it is

purposefully looking for ways to rejuvenate and prepare for the next step or project that we want to undertake. It means renewing, taking care of ourselves, so that we can give everything that we want to give. Also, REST means pressing into God and asking him where I need to be and what do I need to be doing. This sounds so simple, yet it is so hard. I don't always want to slow down; I like to complain about how busy I am. It somehow makes me feel productive and important. Then COVID happened and we all came to a screeching halt. Forced rest is not what any of us were expecting or wanting.

This summer we are going to be talking about the Tabernacle and how it relates to church. You may be wondering how REST and the Tabernacle fit together. What I want to do today is look at how Sabbath-rest and the Tabernacle prepare us for our work and the Promised Land or the something new once COVID is done.

Rest is so important that it is there at the beginning. Our first thought is to jump to Genesis 2 verse 2, "*By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*" God rested from his work; we too need to rest from our work. Have you noticed though that the whole creation story has a small rest included in it? "*And there was evening, and there was morning,*" This phrase is

repeated six times, once after each day. God rested so that he could work. Evening is a time to slow down, rest, and get ready for a new day. Not only did God rest at the *END* of his work; he rested *so that he could* work. What would happen if we started thinking of our days differently; instead of night, or evening, being the end of the day, what if we thought about it as the beginning of our day; that sleep and rest were what we needed before we could start a new day. Would we treat our evenings differently? Would we go to bed sooner? Would we pack less into our evenings? Would we deliberately slow down? Or would we pack more into the evening so that we had less to do in the morning?

In Exodus 20, the 10 commandments are given. The fourth commandment says, “*Remember the Sabbath day be keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.*

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Do we keep a day of Sabbath? I can almost hear the comments, “Well someone has to work on Sunday”, “Essential services need to keep going, regardless of the day, or the pandemic”. It is interesting to see what have been considered “essential services” during this pandemic. Many of the

services we consider ‘essential’ during this pandemic are the lowest paid and most expendable people, the cleaners and those that work in the grocery stores. Yes, we need doctors and nurses, we always have and we always will. I have found it interesting that there are others that are now considered essential that many of us treat with disdain and consider their jobs less than admirable. I’m not saying everyone feels this way, however, some do. Many of those that are now considered essential have made comments on social media about wondering how long they will be appreciated once the pandemic is over. That is a sad commentary on what we consider ‘essential’ in the good times versus the bad times. Yet, even in the busiest of times, we need to take time for God, and keeping a Sabbath.

There is a story I read once about a college student that was determined to get good grades. He studied long hours, spent little time with friends, and spent no time at church. Instead of his grades showing his great effort, his grades started to slip. He wondered what he was doing wrong. As a last resort he turned to God and asked, “Help me get my grades up. I need to pass.” God said, “Give me 24 hours out of every week.” The student replied, “I can’t do that, I will fail.” He felt God’s reply, “That is what you are doing now. What do you have to lose? All I am asking for is 24 hours out of your week.” The student decided to try it. From 6:00 pm on Saturday to 6:00 pm on Sunday he would not study, he would use that time to rest, read his Bible, go to church, spend time with family and friends. Over

the next couple of months, he noticed that his grades started to improve, he was more rested, his relationships were better, and he felt that he was once more in a good place with God. For some of us, Saturday and Sunday are not a Sabbath or a day of rest. Biblically, those would be the days to choose. Yet, with shift work and the way we do life these days, Saturday and Sunday are not always easy to stop and rest. What other day of the week could you choose instead? Would Monday be a better day? Or what about a Wednesday? Pick 24 consecutive hours to give to God. How do you think that would change your life? Does it mean you cannot spend time with family, and doing the things that energize you? No. It means being intentional about your time and setting it aside, asking God how to use those 24 hours.

Later in Exodus, chapter 23:10-13, we learn a little bit more about the Sabbath Laws. Not only are we supposed to set one day aside a week one year in seven is supposed to be given to God. In the seventh year “*let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.*” I suggested that to my farmer husband one time, he did not take that well. “You can’t do that. What would happen to the land? Think of all the weeds! All that hard work.” Those may not have been his exact words, but I think you get the idea. I can only imagine what other farmers would say. What would it

look like if we did that though? Have we become so urbanized that the very idea of leaving crop for someone else to harvest goes against everything we have worked so hard for? What would happen to world hunger and poverty if we actually practiced a Sabbath rest for the land? I'm not saying to leave everything fallow in one year, rotate which field gets to rest. Also, in our day and age, I'm not sure people would know what to do. Though I have noticed that there are posts out about the fact that there is not a beef shortage, only a packaging shortage. "Find your friends and talk to a local farmer and butcher, they can get you meat." What would life look like if we gave every seventh year to God and ask him to direct our paths, decisions, and works for that year? Would our year look different than a 'normal' one? Are there things that we would add to our year? Would there be things that we would delete? How would we prepare for the year after we take a break?

We have become so busy that we do not know how to slow down anymore. One of the biggest reasons that we need rest, a Sabbath, is because we need to prepare for what is to come. In Exodus the people of Israel have just left Egypt. Moses has brought down the 10 commandments, the people have gotten restless and gotten Aaron to make them a calf to worship, God's anger burns against the Israelites, Moses pleads for the people, God punishes those that have not followed him, many die, and many follow God. In the middle of all this, God tells Moses to

build the Tabernacle. In chapter 25 we see the offerings that are brought for the Tabernacle. Starting in Chapter 26 we read how the Tabernacle is supposed to be created. From chapter 36 on, we see how the craftsmen make the Tabernacle, and in chapter 40 we read about the setting up of the Tabernacle and how every piece is precisely placed. Once the Tabernacle is set up "*Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*" God came to be with his people. So that they could see a physical manifestation of who they served. At night the cloud was filled with fire. When the cloud lifted, the Israelites packed up camp and moved on. They lived in the Wilderness for 40 years, preparing for the Promised Land. If they had followed the instructions in the first place, there would not have been the 40 years of preparation to finally get to where they were supposed to go. How often do we not follow through on instructions that we have been given? The 40 years in the Wilderness were an opportunity to understand God and to prepare for what had been promised. It was a time of rest and preparation. They needed to prepare their hearts, their minds, and their bodies for what was to come. We are in our own wilderness. Not knowing what is on the other side of COVID. How are we preparing for it? What is going to happen once we are released from restriction? Will there be things that are the same? Will things be different? Does God have something new planned? Do you want to be part of that plan? How are you preparing for the future?

I want to conclude with an illustration. When a young child hurts themselves or is tired, they crawl up on your lap, lay their head on your shoulder, rest their forehead on your neck and press into you. Looking for comfort and relief. You wrap your arms around your child, whisper words of encouragement and love into their ears and heart. Once they have received those ministrations, they go on their way, refreshed. Knowing that they are loved and cared for. In my mind's eye, I see God waiting for us to crawl up on his lap, press into him, wait for his words of comfort and encouragement, feel his healing arms wrap around us and refresh us. When we are rested, we can once again go about our work; refreshed and rejuvenated. Is God still the master of the Universe? Yes!! Does God still want us to follow him and obey him? Yes!! What is he asking you to do today? What do you need to rest up for so that you are prepared for what is to come? Use this time of rest and pause to ask God where he wants you to be and what he wants you to be doing once the pause is over.