

Temples in Time

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church - Brunswick, ME

Sunday, October 30, 2016

Scripture: [Matthew 12:1-8](#)

Introduction to the Scripture

If you grew up in a particularly church-y background, the red paraments (hang-y things) might have led you to think about what day it is in our church calendar... and if you were, let's face it, probably Lutheran growing up, you already knew: today is what the church celebrates as Reformation Sunday. Tomorrow, it will have 499 years since Martin Luther left his most promising of all to-do lists on the church doors in Wittenburg... 95 Theses: disagreeing, pretty agreeably by most counts, with the practices of what we *now* call the Roman Catholic Church.

A lot has happened in between then and now. A lot already had happened. People of God have been disagreeing for a long time, and the people of God have been expanding and changing and learning, oh my. Jesus's disputes with the religious authorities of his time make up the richness of his teaching tradition left to us in the gospels. Two subjects appear a bit more than most: forgiveness and sabbath.

Today, we'll hear Jesus disagreeing with the authorities around him about the sabbath. (To celebrate the Protestant Reformation, your pastor has chosen to pick a fight with the Protestant Work-Ethic.) This is a story that appears in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Interestingly, we don't have what we might call "a clean copy"... even in the earliest gospel, Mark, it is clear that the source of the dispute and Jesus's summary of his teaching after, come from different sources. In every telling of the story, Jesus resolves, or leaves, the tension slightly differently. Of all the sabbath teaching, this is unique, since it isn't Jesus's action that sets the story in motion, it's his friends'.

I need to say that this text means so much to me and to my understanding of how we are to value our human lives that I use it at the end of life. There are a few families here today that have honored loved ones with this text with me. Each of those good friends in life knew how to share joy with friends, and to hold that as a holiness above any other. They knew how to carve out space that honored the preciousness of moments spent together in mutual love.

So, if this text leaves you tender today... I hope you know how much it does me too.

Sermon

Rest... and be fed.

I have spent the last week in a bizarre kind of performance art of this sermon. Anyone else had this weeks long cold thing that's going around? Sing it, y'all.

I had absolutely no idea how much of my life I would devote to preaching about sabbath when I decided to go into ministry. Maybe that doesn't surprise you, I was coming from a period of life that had kind of boundless energy, and propelled by the staggering newness of knowing what on earth I was supposed to be doing with my life... For a long time, I thought it was all going to be that kind of "flow" where you work so hard and with so much love you kind of wake up and realize that missed lunch 3 or four hours ago...

That still happens, sort of... but not all the time, and that's a really really good thing. I can quote you all the statistics about how much we all work... all work after all the technology that my good buddy John Maynard Keynes was so sure was gonna mean a 15 hour work week. He wasn't wrong about the productivity gains, he just didn't think that we be foolish enough to distribute the gains unequally, and that we might never be satisfied. i.e. that we would favor being more than four times richer rather than working a quarter of the time.

You know you need rest, right? Do I still need to say this? You know it was woven right into the fabric of us... of all that grows and lives... stretch and grow... and then rest and renew... and ... you know, the leaves are right outside if you're looking for the metaphor here, right?

I do still need to say it. And I do. We are part of the people of Moses, who led perhaps the most famous collective work stoppage in the history of ever. Over what? The Sabbath. It's a good story: we can re-tell it.

The argument at the heart of Jesus's debate with the Pharisees, of course, wasn't just about the holiness of the Sabbath, it was about what behavior might be considered holy enough *for* the sabbath. We, for better or for worse, try to recognize the special day piece, the obligation... The great Rabbi Abraham Heschel called the Sabbath a Palace in Time... but we're all too glad to put small walls around it.... but we've really lost what Jesus stands up for here:

Rest... and be fed.

This story is amazing because it's not Jesus getting in trouble for breaking the sabbath. Which he did—a lot—by healing on the special day. Also, as we recognize Reformation Day the day before this year... it's good to note that he also did a lot of Sabbath Days—observed. One of his favorite tricks is what we would call the "unannounced staff retreat." Disciples? Into the boat. Yes, I know it's Wednesday. We're going to a quiet place.

It's Jesus's friends that have been naughty here, picking grain being a form of work. But, see, they were hungry.

We are all hungry. Hungry for rest, hungry for time, hungry for quiet in a noisy noisy world, hungry for true goofy, unfettered friendship. So Jesus steps in.

“Something greater than the temple is here.” He says. And we know he’s right. We know the power and the holiness and the rhythm of rest, relationship, of being fed in body and spirit. Jesus reminds us, as theologian Walter Brueggeman says:

Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one’s life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being. - Walter Brueggeman, Sabbath as Resistance

Sabbath is not another productivity requirement: “please put on a good show for God at the end of the work week”. Sabbath is a *creativity* requirement: remember that you were made with the pattern of life woven into your being, grow and rest, wake and sleep... be.

Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea’s writings: “God desires mercy and not sacrifice...” [Hosea 6:6](#)

So this is not your pastor’s chance to dump on Sunday sports... God doesn’t need the attendance sheet to be full every week. God does desire that we have a deep and innate sense of belonging and be beloved. I hope that’s a thing you find here... and I’m guessing you do because, well, here you are... even though I know there are some who have to be away for a game today... it’s ok, they’ll be back, and they’ll be fed by the welcome that greets them. If you find that sense of belovedness and belonging somewhere else, fabulous, and I hope that you have friends here that you’ll share that with. We can be First Parish Church all over the place... just watch us.

This is your pastor’s chance to say we may all, as a community and a society have to have a talk about the sacrifice of productivity, versus the mercy of creativity. Too many people are working too many jobs for too many hours with not enough time to be people. Keynes really whiffed on his prediction. So, this is not a gripe at Gen-X and Millennial parents for not taking time to breathe, when they are facing up to stagnant wages in the face of mounting debt and decreasing opportunities. I see you out there with your side hustle and your extra work hours. We may have to talk about whole industries: the Standing Rock Sioux and 270 some other native tribes are currently trying to have a talk with us about the productivity of our need for oil through the Dakota Access Pipeline, versus the *creativity* of their water supply. We should be listening. I, as the descendent of colonial folk, find myself desiring mercy for and not sacrifice from those have borne far too much sacrifice at our hands.

And we need to talk about our own lives, of course.

In Mary’s sermon last week, in which she *went there* on money, and what makes us a little shy about it sometimes, she really beautifully encouraged us to be unafraid to have “the talk” with our children whether they are young or old... Because they are watching us. They are learning, even if we aren’t talking. And if we’re hiding it from them? Even better, then they’re just learning from the media what we should value with our money. So, you know, it’s you or *The Voice*.

Today, I just want to say: Our kids are learning from us how to spend *time*, too. And if we hide it from them... well, that's the worst lesson... because they don't see us. I guess I want us to have a talk with our kids about how we spend *time* just as much as we should talk about how we spend *money*. Or at least be aware that they are learning from what they see.

They see us overtired. They see us working. They see us running. They see us watching the clock. They see us hungry.

I'll tell you the most powerful sight that I can see on a Tuesday. Because whatever to the special day. On a Tuesday from my chair... if I am leaning back in my chair and not writing diligently I can still see a Confirmation Mentor or two and their charges, long after confirmation... still meeting up occasionally to walk the labyrinth. Friends, when comes to our kids... Get caught walking the labyrinth. Get caught reading for no purpose but your own. Get caught staring in awe at nearly nothing. Get caught being quiet. Quiet and blessed. Because you are.

Reformation Day indeed. 499 years ago, there was a great, wide, silence... and a sense of generosity and creativity so grand... It moved a monk to speak wild and wise truth to a thing so old as the church. To say that we each were so precious to God that no one need intercede for us. That our relationship with the holy was as close as two friends at the side of a field eating the wild grain of the earth together. We were re-formed. And we still will be. So where is the silence you are yearning for? What is the food that will sustain you? Seek it out. Not because you are selfish... but because the world desperately needs it. What will your note on the church door be?

What will you build from all the moments in your life? What spaces will you create and carve out to remind yourself... the world will find a way to measure you unless you can find a way to rest in the immeasurable.

Rest.

Remember that even resting you are called by name and loved by God.

Still all the noise of the world and give yourself the time to listen with your heart.

Receive simple gifts of food, of drink.

Taste the earth that grew and rested, stretched for sun, and slept by night.

Receive gifts of grace and love from others. Give them back in season.

Know that whatever the way forward,
does not depend on how much you can produce.

You are not your quarterly earnings.

You are not your soccer score.

You are not the success of your family, or your team, or your company. Or even your church.

You are not results.

You are a disciple of the living Christ. Blessed and called to rest... and be fed.