

This morning I want to talk about bagels & orange juice, Deuteronomy, children, traffic, McDonald's, what real love looks like, animals, and Jesus.

After the service, if you're still talking to me, you can let me know if you think Jenna and I sinned last week in service to the church.

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Last Sunday we had a special treat before church: bagels from Goldberg's! I was so excited I cheated on my practice of not eating anything before Sunday communion.

Jenna picked up bagels and asked me to bring orange juice. Being me, I waited till the last minute and went to Wal-Mart around 7:30 on Sunday morning.

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Deuteronomy reminds us this morning about one of the Ten Commandments we have pretty much quit paying attention to: "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. You shall not do any work, nor shall your children or your servants or your farm animals or the immigrants who live in your towns."

It's time we re-examined the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy.

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The story of God giving Moses the Ten Commandments is told in Exodus AND Deuteronomy. Both versions are important, and you need to hear them both.

In Exodus God says, “Because I created for 6 days, then rested,
you will work for 6 days, then rest.”

But in Deuteronomy God says, “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt.
Remember what that was like.”

“Now make sure you keep the Sabbath,
and make doubly sure that everybody below you in the pecking order
gets a day of rest, too, or else you’re acting more like
a slave master than a freed slave.

Jesus is going to add something important to this conversation,
but let’s not rush past Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Exodus speaks to that part of you that creates, builds, produces,
that believes in hard work and wants to honor God.

If the Creator could hard for six days and rest on the 7th, then I will, too.

But Deuteronomy speaks to that part of you concerned with fairness,
that cares about the little guy;
that part of you that tries to love your neighbor as yourself.

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Maybe the part of you that loves God and the part of you
that loves your neighbor should both hear God’s continuing
commandment to keep the Sabbath holy.

And this is where Jesus comes in.

Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for humankind,
not humankind for the sabbath.”

It's easy to only hear the shallow version of this morning's gospel.

That those legalistic Pharisees were stuck in their sabbath laws
until Jesus came along and showed them that laws and rituals
don't really matter. That it's just about love.

If that was ever the lesson from this gospel,
I assure you it is not the one we need today.

Today we largely ignore the Sabbath because somewhere we
bought into the lie that it was a loyalty test created by God.

As if God said, "Prove you love me by not working every...seventh day."
If that were the case, then to use Jesus' phrase,
humanity would have been created for the Sabbath.

But what really happens is God knows that in our greed,
in our fear of scarcity we have a dangerous tendency to think that
our worth as human beings is based on what we can do,
and we have an even more dangerous tendency
to think of other people as having no worth at all
except for what they can do for me.

Especially when those other people look or speak differently than I do,
when they don't have as much money or status as I do.

If you think I'm exaggerating, you should hear UGA law professor
Mehrsa Baradaran talk about her new book "The Color of Money,"
about how our banking practices have kept generations
of African-Americans from accumulating wealth.

God didn't create the Sabbath as a test.

God gave us the Sabbath to remind us that we are all human beings.



With fear and trembling, let me give some examples.

Each one has some other explanation but when you add them up
they point to a truth: our lives are diminished
because we don't keep the Sabbath that God gives us.

Here's an example for Atlantans: traffic.

This weekend I-75 S Metro Express Lanes will be closed
so road workers can work overnight and through the weekend.

I know that anybody who commutes appreciates their work
but I wonder what the cost is for our weekday convenience?
Not the monetary cost. The human cost?

When did we decide it was okay for hard, dangerous jobs to be done
at the times most convenient for the people benefiting from the work,
and least convenient for the people doing the work?
And what about their families?

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Or let's look at a log in our own eye.

Every Sunday morning we hire a porter to come here and open up
and make the coffee, and we hire two
professionally trained workers to run our nursery.

We're grateful to have them, but let's be honest:
we hire them to give up their Sunday morning
so we can enjoy ours.

Or what about those folks at Goldberg's and Wal-Mart last Sunday?
When did it become okay to see myself first as a consumer
whose convenience must be accommodated 24/7,
and only secondarily see myself as a neighbor
called to love my neighbors in concrete ways?

Market forces are real,
and maybe the ethics of this would be different if all those people
working on what ought to be a day of rest
were working their way through law school,
or working an extra job to save up for
a down payment on a house.

But that's not what happens, is it?
DOT construction jobs aren't filled by law students
working over the summer.

Most of the ladies working the midnight to 8am shift
on Sunday morning at the McDonald's by my house
aren't working an *extra* job, are they? That's just their job.

And those jobs aren't filled by *our* children.
They're filled by the people Deuteronomy would probably look at
and call our servants and resident aliens.

We have forgotten, if we ever really knew it,
that through Christ we are adopted into the people
who were freed from slavery by the merciful hand of God.

But our consumerism and greed has allowed this country to look
less like a promised land and a lot more like the land of Pharaoh.



And just to make sure I get in trouble with all of you, one more example.

Check my biases here, but we need to examine what we teach our children
when we schedule every day of their lives, including the Lord's Day.

Again, I'm biased, but a look at how we do childhood activity
might be in order.

If Sunday morning were the time folks who don't follow Jesus
were dropping off their kids at the park to walk through creeks
and skip rocks, then that would be one thing.

But that's not what happens, is it?

Scouts and sports and band and all the rest are our kids' jobs.

Through organized play we expect them to learn
a whole collection of important life skills

that will help them become successful adults.

And it works, thanks be to God. It really does.

I'm a big believer in scouts and sports and band and all of it.

But I wonder if we've started teaching our kids that their job -
and it is their job - is now 7 days a week.

I wonder if we're teaching them that achievement
is the most important thing of all.

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Here's the danger.

First, when we don't set aside regular...REGULAR time in our lives
to just be - to be with God, to be by ourselves,
to be with the people we love - then we become less
of who God created us to be.

Second, it becomes easier and easier to value other people
not simply because God made them,
but because of what they can do for us.

It becomes easier to live by supply and demand
rather than Creator and beloved creation.

It becomes easier to wave money in front of low-wage workers
and expect them to cook biscuits at 4am on Sunday morning
because I might have a craving.

It becomes easier to tell people with good paying DOT jobs
that if they don't want to work the 3-11am shift on Sunday
that we'll find somebody else who will.

It becomes easier to see our need for worship
and our desire for convenience as one and the same.

And it become easier to teach our children
that they need to work Monday-Friday in school
and Saturday-Sunday on their activities
so that when they're adults they'll be on the right side
of Pharaoh's have and have-not society.

Sisters and brothers, once we start to value people by their productivity,
it's only a short jump to see people we think aren't being productive
as not really being people.
Or to see them as non-human threats. To see them as animals.



Jesus said the Sabbath was made for humanity, not the other way around.
I think Jesus means that keeping the Sabbath shouldn't be a ritual act,
like how we pass the Peace in Church.

I think Jesus means the Sabbath should be a lived reality.
It should be a hard, messy, complicated part of our day to day existence.

We need to build a day of rest into our laws and our society,
not to create a state religion, but because it lives well.

Because it makes better people and societies,
because it is part of the natural order of things.

And I think that Holy Trinity should try a little harder to live this out.

Every Sunday we come to this altar and we take communion.

We eat of the one bread and drink from the one cup,
and we proclaim that we are one with each other in this parish,
that we are one with Christians all over the world
and throughout all time and space.
We say that we are one with Christ.

Shouldn't Christians like that be interested in a concrete practice of love
that reminds the whole world of our shared humanity?



So what to do?

Obviously there's no magic wand,
and even if there were we aren't ready to reclaim the Sabbath.

I get that.

I live in the same world y'all do and struggle with the same pressures
and take the same things for granted that y'all do.

I get stuck in traffic.

I want the best for my kids.

I want a biscuit from McDonald's when I want one.

And sometimes I feel so busy just trying to help my family
get by in the world that IS,
that it hurts my feelings when somebody tells me that's not enough,
that I need to imagine a better way of living.

But Jesus died to save us, and he showed us that better way exists.

He showed us that if we dare to believe,
neither our fear or greed can stop this better way.

Friends, the world changes every day, and the ideas that change it
start out sounding ridiculous, then one day they sound dangerous,
then impractical, and then one day their time arrives.

Maybe you could take a few days this week and ponder
how keeping the Sabbath holy could make us different.

It's not about showing God how obedient you are.

It's about claiming the life God desires for all of us,
especially the ones who have less than you do.

Jesus said the Sabbath is a gift to us from God. Take it.

Amen.