

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

1-Narrative – Summer – Sabbath – Week 2  
Genesis 2:1-3; Mark 6:6-13, 30-32

18 August 2019

### “The Personal Dimension of Sabbath”

When I was a teenager my mother used to drive me nuts.  
I had to get up really early for school Monday through Friday,  
and on Sunday we went to the 8:00 early service at church,  
which meant that Saturday was the only day my sleep-deprived teenaged self could sleep in.  
But there it would be – sometimes at 8 o'clock in the morning and sometimes even before –  
the sound of the vacuum cleaner right outside my bedroom door!  
But that was my mom.  
Until the last few years of her life when ill health hampered her, she never stopped, she never sat down.  
My dad wasn't home much, so she raised the kids, cleaned the house, ran the errands,  
was active in church, volunteered as a tutor, and had a whole group of homebound people she would visit.  
She had no concept of Sabbath.  
In fact, in the summer when there was no 8:00 service at our home church,  
my mom (a pastor's wife!) would go to other congregations that did have one.  
“If I don't get to 8 o'clock church,” she'd say, “my whole day is shot! I'll never get everything done!”

She trained me well, too.  
I guess she was afraid that idle hands would be the devil's playground  
because she programmed me to be busy all the time.  
Before school I would practice my piano for an hour.  
After school on Monday would be a piano lesson, Tuesday was choir, Wednesday Girl Scouts,  
Thursday a 2nd piano lesson, Friday cheerleading practice, Saturday ballet, gymnastics, and jazz dancing,  
and Sundays, Sunday School, church, and youth group.  
And in addition to homework, there was sewing my own clothes and knitting and embroidery and reading to do.  
Despite the verbal message I got at church that my value was in who I was as a child of God,  
the louder, overarching and conflicting message I got everywhere else –  
and even in subtle ways at church – was that my value lay in what I did.

And I'm sure I am not alone.

We live in a society shaped by the Protestant work ethic.  
Someone asks us, “How are you?”  
And what do we say? “Busy!”, holding out the word like a badge of honor,  
proof that we're not wasting time, that we're working hard enough to justify our space on the planet.

We celebrate the fact that we live in freedom in this country,  
but the truth of the matter is there is a voice inside of us that drives us as relentlessly  
as the fiercest slave master.

Work! Longer, faster, smarter.

Work! Your boss, your teacher, your spouse, your friend, your parents, your kids,  
your church, your volunteer organization need you to get things done!

Work! Or you'll let everyone down, you'll fail, and everyone will know you're a failure.  
And everything around you will fall apart.

Work! At your company, your school, your home,  
and make sure you answer phone calls and texts and emails and check FB and Instagram and Snapchat!  
(Did you know that the average American checks their phone 80 times a day – while on vacation!?)

No wonder we're exhausted, tired, drained.  
No wonder we're chronically over-committed, under-resourced, and devoid of joy.  
No wonder that no matter how long or hard we work or how much we accomplish, it never feels like enough.

We live in a frantic, frenetic, fragmented world, and into that world God speaks a word of grace and peace:  
"Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Six days you shall work and on the seventh, rest."

Why should we rest?  
Because 3 things arise from rest: meaning, creativity and joy.

The first thing that arises from rest is meaning.  
What we do needs to arise from who we are – and not the other way around.  
If I asked you why God put you here on earth could you tell me?  
Have you figured out the underlying meaning of your life?  
Is there a lightness of being to your life, a heart full of love, a soul overflowing with joy?  
If we are simply living our lives reacting and responding to the needs of others –  
family members, friends, employers, teachers, volunteer organizations, church –  
then chances are we are not living that abundant life that Jesus promised.

Author Jia Jiang tells the story of growing up in Beijing China and at the age of 14 hearing Bill Gates speak. Jia was so impressed and inspired he wrote a letter to his family saying that by the time he was 25 he was going to have built a company in the United States so large that he could buy out Bill Gates. His parents kept the letter and when he was 30 they sent it to him and asked how things were going! Well, as it turned out Jia had indeed ended up coming to this country. He had gone to school and found a good job. He had gone for more school and had obtained a better job. He had bought a car and a house. He had married, and they were expecting a baby. He was working in corporate America, living the American dream. But it wasn't his dream and he wasn't happy. His wife, Tracey, asked him, "What happened to that excited, enthusiastic, energetic young man I married?" He replied that he had grown up and that he was being responsible. And she said "It's not responsible to not do what you were put here on earth to do." She told him to quit his job and spend 6 months pursuing his dream. So he did. It didn't go quite as he expected, but he did find meaning in his life, and fulfillment and joy.

So many of us work day after day after day after day – without stopping to even consider why God put us here. Knowing that's what we would do, God gave us a commandment –  
take 1 day out of every 7 and do nothing, just be,  
so that you stop and remember who you are, why you're here, and where you're going.  
And then the things you do will have meaning and purpose and direction.

The first thing that arises from rest is meaning; the second is creativity.  
We tend to think of rest as a reward to be earned  
and perhaps that's because we read that God created and after creation God rested.  
But if you stop and think about it, God also was resting and reflecting BEFORE God ever started creating.  
So it's out of the non-action, the non-doing, the non-working time that creation arose.

The truth that rest proceeds creativity/action/work is subtly conveyed in the first chapter of Genesis. There we read that after each stage in creation  
"...there was evening and there was morning, the...[whatever]...day."  
Anything strike you as odd about that phrase?  
It doesn't say that there was morning and evening, but rather there was evening and morning.

In other words, Genesis and thus Jewish tradition tells us that the day begins when the sun goes down. All creativity, invention & construction happens in the second half of the day, fueled by, & resulting from, rest. Each and every day begins with rest and AFTER rest, comes creation, action, work.

“And when the Sabbath day arrives, everything stops, whether you are ready or not. Sabbath interrupts and takes over.

You don’t start Sabbath after all the work is done, the house is clean,  
the thank you notes are written, and the gutters are cleared.

When the sun hits the horizon, you stop.

The phone goes off, the screens go dark, the work is put down  
and the only thing left is human beings being human.”<sup>i</sup>

Any true artist or musician or writer will tell you

that the creative process cannot be driven or forced or made to happen.

There needs to be free time and space and an open mind and heart and spirit  
in order for the creative juices to flow freely.

That’s the reason people need time for vacations and continuing education and days off.

Sure you can force someone to work day in and day out, but the quality of the work will suffer hugely.

I’m sure that if each of us set an entire day aside each week as Sabbath and did no work that day,  
we’d more than make up for those hours with increased creativity, productivity & energy the other 6 days.

The first thing that arises from rest is meaning. The second is creativity. And the third is joy.

God does not create merely for the sake of creating.

God creates to enjoy.

And we as God’s creatures are meant to enjoy the life that we’ve been given.

If all we ever do is work, what’s the point of it all?

I’m sure we all know of people who were workaholics –

spending all their time working so that they could save money so that one day they could enjoy themselves,  
only to find their plans ruined by ill health or maybe even death.

God gives us the Sabbath, a day of rest, as a gift

that we might enjoy the fruits of our labors, the work of others, and the blessings of God,  
on a regular, weekly basis.

“Besides creating and declaring things good, God gives three blessings at creation:

God blesses the creatures (1:22), the humans (1:28), and the rest itself (2:3).

God stops working and enjoys what God has made.

An integral part of creating this earth for God is enjoying the beauty and harmony of each creature and feature  
contributing its unique music to the exquisite symphony.”<sup>ii</sup>

That is how important the Sabbath is. And if my mother were here, I would tell her what I’m going to tell you.

If you are exhausted, tired, drained,

if you are over-committed, under-resourced, devoid of joy,

if you feel that no matter how much you do, it’s never enough,  
try keeping the third commandment.

For when we stop and rest, we enter the place of transformation

in which God sets us free from all that binds us, awakens us from death to life,  
restores our souls, and pours joy into our hearts.

If you want more out of life, do less. Take one day a week and rest.

I guarantee it will make a difference. **Amen**

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4093](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4093)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.