August 25th , 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Ordinary Time

10:30 am

Redefining Sabbath

I. The Good Ole Days

I can’t say I’ve seen much of the good ole days, but I’ve heard about an America where shops were closed on a Sunday, people wouldn’t cut their lawn, or folks would have an intentional time of slowing down. The only lifestyle that I can think of in modern America is the Amish – closed off from much of society except for some commerce, but on Sundays, Sundays still remain a day of rest.

In most of America, you’ll find church competing, if you will, with sports teams, extracurricular activities, or social events. And you will find many people who are frustrated by these events that have gotten in the way of the traditional Church Sunday experience of worship and a meal and family time. And the times have changed and so have priorities, and we long for Sabbath standards again.

Yet, I dare to propose, what if we, the church, are the ones who are actually called to adjust. Rather than blaming the sports teams or the rigorous pace of the world, what if we are the ones who are stuck in different times? A sharp reality, a real truth is: these events, these sports, these things are not going to leave, and rather than complaining or shaming or guilting, what are called to do as a church? Maybe we need different times to worship, maybe different experiences – perhaps instead of waiting for the world to change, what if we changed too?

II. Redefining Sabbath

This, my friends, is one of the questions we need to be asking about the Sabbath. Jesus challenges the elites on what Sabbath means. In retrospect, it sounds ridiculous that someone would ever give Jesus a hard time for healing – for doing the very work of God on the Sabbath. Who do these elites think they are?

But again, when we constrain the Sabbath to our own historical meanings – who do we think we are? Who do we think we are to claim we have an upper hand on Sabbath? Who are we to claim that Sabbath has to look a certain way for it to qualify as Sabbath? Instead of sighing at the world, what if we again were a bit curious about what Sabbath means to us today?

III. How to Sabbath

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew verb, Shabbat – which means, ‘to rest from labor.’ We inherited this very formal idea of Sabbath on the seventh day from the book of Exodus. I would challenge the elites who questioned Jesus – was healing not a rest from labor? Was healing laborious for Jesus? And even it if was, in that moment, is it not okay to take a break from Sabbath for someone in need and then go back to that rest? Jesus challenges the historical function of Sabbath – it sounds like we also have the call to challenge Sabbath today too.

What does Sabbath mean for you? What does rest look like for you? Sabbath for pastors isn’t usually on a Sunday, so my Sabbath looks different: it looks like weeding the lawn. Is that labor? Not for me, it is a moment to mindlessly pull the weeds from the earth and connect to God’s creation. Sometimes Sabbath for me is sitting at the drafting desk and working on art. Is it laborious on my hands and mind – yes – but it is an opportunity to connect with my creating God.

Again, what does Sabbath look like for you? It may look like a time of rest that is napping, reading, lighting a candle and praying, perhaps gardening or taking photos. Whatever your Sabbath looks like, and whatever my Sabbath looks like – it probably will not fit in that very confined box that we are offered in the historical book of Exodus.

IV. Sabbath Worship

Sabbath, in the historical sense, would be a full day experience. I can’t tell you the last time I experienced a full day of complete rest unless I was ill. Our worlds, minds, and hearts aren’t necessarily fit for that kind of Sabbath, and maybe that’s ok. Maybe you can find Sabbath in every day, maybe in the moment, maybe in an hour, maybe in an experience by yourself or with friends. Rather than Sabbath solely as rest, Sabbath is also a time for connection with our Great God.

I do believe that our hour of worship together is Sabbath. It is a time where we intentionally step into this space – but do we rest? No, we stand up, we sing, we engage our brains, we engage our hearts, we explore and ground ourselves further in relationship with God and with one another. Worship, by no means, is stagnan. It is active work.

Worship is Sabbath, in the sense that it is a time of connection, not necessarily for rest. If we claim that worship is important, and that this time is important, I have a few points we need to carefully consider not only this week, but beyond.

First, I spoke about the other scheduled events on Sunday mornings – ballgames, social events, etc. As a church, as Springfield, I want to challenge us to think about what it means for us to not expect the world to conform to us. How do we get ‘those’ folks in the sanctuary? Maybe it’s through a different worshipping experience, what if it’s about joining these folks. For a lot of folks who are athletic, not me – I don’t run, but I’ve heard – people find sports as a good release and a time of rest in its own way, and sometimes the only time to do that is a Sunday morning. So again, Springfield, how can we offer the Sabbath worship experience in a world that is changing? How do we adapt?

Second, I’d like you to think about what Sabbath means to you. Beyond this notion we have in Exodus, what does it mean to experience rest and connection. And open your calendar and plan it in. Some people say – take time for self care. It’s a similar notion – schedule your time for some time to breathe, relax, take a walk, do some yoga – you don’t have to physically rest, but find a place for connection in this fast paced world.

IV. Moving from here to Sabbath

From this place, I want you to talk in fellowship about these two topics. I want you to share your thoughts, concerns, questions, ideas with our elders and with one another. I am not the church, we are the church – and if we long to be on the move and engage in the community, we’ve got to start to ask the hard questions and look at them with both feet in. We have to have the conversations.

And know, that as you have these conversations, the Spirit is on the move to guide us, encourage us, and lead us in the great work we are called to and will help us understand Sabbath and its role in our lives. Amen.