

Practice of Rest



Understanding Sabbath

- We need to understand Sabbath not in terms of the legalism of whether or not we should do anything on a Sunday, and if so what - that would be the approach of the Pharisees. – rather in terms of what the practice of rest is able to form in us.
- For the Jews two reasons were given for their Sabbath
 - Exodus 20:8-11 – Related to Creation and God's activity
 - Deuteronomy 5:12-15 – Related to Slavery and Freedom
- You may also want to consider: Isaiah 58:13-14; Mark 2; Matt 12; Luke 6
- What differing things is the practice of Sabbath supposed to ensure that they remember, because it is built into their lives?
 - How can we honour God's work in the world, his creation?
 - How can we re-enact 'slavery' in our lives? How can we embody freedom?

thoughts from “Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places” - Eugene Peterson

- The reason given in Exodus is that this is what God did; God worked six days and quit working on the seventh ... When we remember the Sabbath and rest on it we enter into and maintain the rhythm of creation. We keep time with God. Sabbath-keeping preserves and honors time as God's gift of holy rest. [p111]
- The reason given in Deuteronomy is that when God's people were slaves in Egypt it was work, work, work — incessant, unrelieved work; they must never themselves perpetuate such oppression; they must quit work each seventh day so that their slaves and livestock and children will get a day off ... We remember the Sabbath and rest on it in order to enter into and maintain the freedom of creation, to experience and share God's deliverance and love for others. Sabbath-keeping preserves and honors time as God's gift of holy freedom. [p111]
- The most striking thing about keeping the Sabbath is that it begins by not doing anything. The Hebrew word *shabbat*, which we take over into our language untranslated, simply means, "Quit... Stop ... Take a break." As such, it has no religious or spiritual content: Whatever you are doing, stop it... Whatever you are saying, shut up.... Sit down and take a look around you.... Don't do anything.... Don't say anything.... Fold your hands.... Take a deep breath. So begin by not doing anything: attend, adore. [p109]
- Sabbath is a deliberate act of interference, an interruption of our work each week, a decree of no-work so that we are able to notice, to attend, to listen, to assimilate this comprehensive and majestic work of God, to orient our work in the work of God. [p110]
- Most of us spend most of our time in the workplace. But without Sabbath, in which God goes beyond the workplace (but not away from it), the workplace is soon emptied of any sense of the presence of God and the work becomes an end in itself. It is this "end in itself" that makes an un-sabbathed workplace a breeding ground for idols. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce all relationships to functions that we can manage. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce work to the dimensions of our egos and control. [p116]

thoughts from “Finding Sanctuary” – Abbot Christopher Jamison

- People speak and act as if 'being busy' is a force beyond their control, as if somewhere back in history a malign spirit of busy-ness invaded the planet ... [but] I ask them: 'Why have you allowed yourself to get into this state [of busy-ness]?' The question throws them ... They and many others have an unspoken assumption that 'modern life' is busy that being busy is one of the penalties of living in a developed country in the twenty-first century and that one day they will make a life decision to escape from all this ... but not yet.

- Put simply, if somebody says they are too busy then either they *are* too busy or they *think* they are too busy. Either way, the responsibility lies with them; they choose to lead a busy life or they choose to think that they do. When I have said to people on retreat that they have chosen to be busy, they find this impossible to accept. Yet the experience of the five men seen in *The Monastery* suggests that this is truer than most people realise ... Tony and Anthony in particular kept using their mobiles for days after their arrival and found it difficult to settle into not being busy.
- The 'it all' of 'get away from it all' is an assumed world of ceaseless activity to which there is no answer other than to leave it behind for a week or two by going on holiday ... As well as tourism, other industries are springing up around the 'too busy' belief: health spas called 'Sanctuary', offering 'heaven'; radio stations called 'Smooth' offering relaxation and 'alternative therapies' that 'eliminate all stress'. Now these relaxation products are valuable offerings, but they only deal in symptoms.
- Alongside these solutions to busy-ness are answers in a different mode; a response I have had from some people coming here on retreat was: I can't stand having nothing to do, my hobby keeps my hands and mind focused on something other than my own troubles, in fact I *like* to keep busy. These are what one person called a sort of 'anti-sanctuary' - an alternative busy place to go to take your mind off things. Pets, sport, hobbies are all busy occupations, each a personally chosen busy-ness, an antidote to the enforced busy-ness of the consumerist society. Yet even these can be turned into consumer products designed to make this exhausting society more bearable but in turn creating more exhaustion.
- Abbot Arsenius [4th Century]: One day in his cell, he heard a voice calling to him: 'Come and I will show you the works of men' He followed the voice and it led him to a place where an Ethiopian was cutting wood and making a great pile. He struggled to carry the pile but in vain. Instead of taking some off, however, he cut more wood, which he added to the pile. Then once again he tried to carry it and once again he failed. He kept this up for a long time. Then the voice led Arsenius on further, to where a man was drawing water from a lake and putting it into a broken container so that the water ran back into the lake. Going on further still, he saw two men on horseback carrying a beam between them, one beside the other. They were trying to enter the door of a temple; but the beam would not fit crosswise and neither would draw back to let the other go first so that the beam might go in lengthwise. The story concludes with the voice saying: 'Let everyone be watchful of his actions lest he labour in vain'.

PRACTICING REST

- 1) Stop at various points in your day this week. Points where you would normally fill the space out of habit, like turning the TV on, and enjoy the moment of momentary rest in the midst of doing. Remember how God is with you, working with you.
- 2) Keep a day free of doing those things that 'need' to be done [just one ;o)!]. Resist the guilt and simply rest in God. Allow yourself permission to do nothing, absolutely nothing.
- 3) Set aside an hour for 'holy leisure'. Find an hour when you can nap on a couch, or lie in a hammock, or relax over a coffee.
- 4) Consider those moments in life when you 'need to do certain things. Are these genuine 'needs', or habits, or addictions? Decide not to do them at certain points.
- 5) In the balance of work and rest, decide to make your work-life productive by doing something that you have been putting off, knowing that 'rest' will be more restful knowing that it is done.
- 6) Put clear boundaries on your work-life this week. Be focussed and applied during work. Decide to stop when you said you would.
- 7) ...