

Sermon Series Lent 2017: *living well* – Rest and Recreation

AAW 19th March 2017



“Rest” is defined as “peace, ease or refreshment.” “Relax” means “to become loose or less firm, to have a milder manner, to be less stiff.” The Bible speaks quite highly of rest. It is a repeated theme throughout Scripture, beginning with the creation week (Genesis 2:2-3). God created for six days; then He rested, not because He was tired but to set the standard for human beings to follow. The Ten Commandments made resting on the Sabbath a requirement of the Law (Exodus 20:8-11). Notice that God said, “Remember the Sabbath.” It wasn’t something new; it had been around since creation. All God’s people and their servants and the animals were to have one day in seven to rest. The command to rest was not an excuse to be lazy. You had to work for six days to get to the Sabbath. The land also needed to rest (Leviticus 25:4, 8-12). God is very serious about rest.

True, God desires rest for us because it does not come naturally to us. To rest, we must trust that God will take care of things for us. We should trust that, if we take a day off, the world will not stop turning on its axis. From the beginning (Genesis 3), when we decided that we would start making all the decisions, humankind has become more tense and less able to relax. It was disobedience in the Garden that started the problem, but obedience now will bring the rest that God so desires for us (Hebrews 3:7 - 4:11). If one of the definitions of “relax” is “to become less firm,” then relaxing our grip on our own lives, careers, families, etc., and giving them over to God in faith is the best way to relax.

Scripture reading 1 Kings 19:4-8

In the story, we have just heard Elijah was burnt out. He’d been working none stop. The pressures of other people’s expectations were getting to him and he was fed up with his lot! If I had a pound for every time someone tells me they’re too busy or assumed I’m too busy I would have a large pot of money by now! Many folks are over scheduled, tense, addicted to hurry, preoccupied, frantic and starved for time.

Cramming as much into our Blackberries or iPhone, day planners and to do lists as we wrestle life to make the best use of every spare minute we have.

Yet not much changes. Our over productivity become counterproductive. We finish the day exhausted from work and raising children. Then our free time becomes filled with more demands on an already overburdened life, as illustrated in our sketch earlier.

We might listen to sermons or read books about slowing down and creating more space in our lives. We know about the need for rest and recharging our batteries. But still we don't stop. And if we aren't busy we feel guilty that we are wasting time!

Add to this the storms and trials of life that blow into our lives unexpectedly and catch us off guard, and we wonder why so many of us are disorientated and confused.

We need a rope or life line to lead us home. Fortunately, God has given us several tools to help us be a place that is centred and rooted in God's presence namely the Sabbath or a day of rest, and the daily office often referred to as mini Sabbaths.

We looked at the importance of prayer and study last month. The daily office encourages to build patterns and rhythms into our day that cause us to stop and reconnect with God. The monastic communities have 7 such occasions, many Anglicans try to make Morning and Evening times for prayer. Whenever you build in quiet or devotional time doesn't matter it will probably never be enough to stop the pressures of modern life. We need to pay attention to God in all of life not just the 10 -30 minutes we decide to spare for it. So, on top of setting aside specific times we perhaps we need to find a discipline that enables us to be connected to Christ where ever we are. The ancient Celts were very in tune with the natural world, with what was going on around them, and using the ordinary things of life to lead them into a God centred life.

How might we do about this?

Earlier we tried breathing as a way of relaxing into God's presence now we are going to do a variety of activities using our senses to encourage focusing on the present moment.

1. Sight – video clip of night sky no sound

Watch the clip and just let any thoughts or feelings about life and faith come to the surface.

Often when I take the dogs out late at night I just stand in the garden and look up and the awesomeness of the night sky never fails to lead me to praise.

2. Sound – audio of bird song

Listen to the bird song - how does it make you feel, marvel at creation and how it communicates so naturally

Sometimes if I'm out on the common I just stop and see what I can hear, and it amazing what I would normally miss – the variety of birds, cars, planes, other people or dogs. I can pray for each of these situations then.

3. Smell – balsam tissues

In the bag, you were given is a scented tissue, take it out and inhale the smell. Does it clear your mind? Does it remind you of other things?

What other smells do you enjoy – fresh bread or coffee, flowers and candles, mown grass, each can evoke our memories and stimulate an attitude of gratitude.

4. Taste – boiled sweets

If any allergies please don't eat, but if you want to unwrap your sweet and just savour the favour, enjoy the sweet and the sensation. Think about what has gone into the production of such a simple pleasure.

How might we savour our food more instead of just rushing a meal to get on to the next thing?

5. Touch – feathers

Finally take out the feather, again if allergic please don't do this, but just stroke your hand or face with the feather and appreciate the sensitivity of it.

Think of all the things you touch in a day, the textures and sensations, how might our everyday items prompt us to prayer?

Practicing the presence of God in our everyday presence is undoubtedly a holy habit worth trying and practising. Stopping to smell the coffee, or to appreciate the birdsong will automatically lead you to a deeper appreciation of God as the centre and source of life. Observing the Sabbath or keeping a day of rest (and it doesn't have to be a Sunday) is

not primarily about us or how it benefits us; it is about God and how God forms or recreates us in his image.

A Sabbath is more than just a day off to replenish our energies and make us more effective for the rest of the week. It should involve stopping (for a 24hr period) not just finishing off all the stuff we need to do – and believe me I find this hard, stopping to acknowledge who is on the throne in your life. Trust is the essence of Sabbath as we let go and let God. The second element of keeping Sabbath after stopping is resting, finding something that delights and replenishes you, in other words recreational activities that do exactly that - recreate us. Personally, I find that when I truly do this, stop and rest, I become more energised, more creative, more in tune with God and his will for my life. Few of us would give ourselves a 'no obligation day very often. But God does and when we join in with God's plans our lives are forever transformed.

Questions for Discussion

Reading: 1 Kings 19:4-8

Other references: Genesis 2: 2-3, Exodus 20:8-11 Leviticus 25: 4, 8-12 Genesis 3, Leviticus 25: 4, 8-12, Hebrews 3: 7- 4:11

Response

1. Any comments and reflections on the Biblical readings?
2. Any comments or reflections on the sermon material?

Rest

1. What do you find relaxing?
2. How easy is it to take time out?
3. What things bring you delight?
4. How might you practice daily presence?
5. Is there anything that the church could do to help people become more aware that God is with them in every moment and circumstance?

Recreation

1. What do you find attractive about the concept of keeping a Sabbath?
2. How do you monitor your work/ life balance?
3. What has re- created you lately?
4. How can we help other people achieve some time for recreation?