

Sermon Series: Take Five
Take One: "One Day?"
Exodus 20:8-11; John 5:1-17; Psalm 92:1-5
Salem United Methodist Church
July 27, 2014
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The standard greeting for about the last twenty-five years or more when one is asked, "How are you?" isn't, "I'm fine," but "I'm busy," or "Keeping busy." We state this even with some pride as though not keeping busy has no value. Our sense of worth is tied up, it seems, with how much stress we have. Our exhaustion from keeping busy has become a mark of good character. The busier we are the more important at least to ourselves, if not others, the busier we are.

Being busy every hour of every day is not what God intended for humanity. Paul Desmond composed a song almost sixty years ago and recorded by Dave Brubeck. The lyrics are about someone trying to get another's attention and pleading to just take five minutes to connect with her/him. Listen to the lyrics sung by Carmen McRae, instrumentals by Dave Brubeck quartet. I would like to invite you to listen to the words as though God is inviting us to "Take Five" and acknowledge God.

Did you hear the words? "Won't you stop and take a little time out with me, just take five; Stop your busy day and take the time out to see I'm alive." Perhaps your family or friends think the same thing. Stop and take time with me. When I heard this song, I heard God speaking to us. "Stop your busy day and take the time to see I'm alive." In the unrelenting busyness of our lives we have lost the rhythm of work and rest which God instituted. Remember what God did on the after God created the entire universe in six days? God rested. The next time we hear about not working on the seventh day is when God gives Moses the commandments. We need to remember that the Israelites before they crossed the Red Sea were working non-voluntarily 24/7 for Pharaoh. He didn't care if they dropped dead. He only cared that the structures they were building were completed. Now that God has freed them, God has some lessons for them to learn so God gives them 613 laws. The top ten we call the Ten Commandments. The fourth one is designed to teach the freed Israelite slaves how to rest and why rest is important. One can work six days, but not the seventh. Did you notice as we read this verse that God is an equal opportunity employer when it comes to rest? No one can do any work, no man or woman, no children, no slaves, no strangers, and no animals, either! Everything is to rest.

What is sooooo important about rest that it is listed before commandments like stealing and murder? God said also that we are to keep it holy. The Sabbath is about stopping the busyness of our lives, reconnecting with God, and others. Most spiritual traditions, including the Judeo-Christian ones, recognize keeping the Sabbath holy. Both our Jewish and Seventh-Day Adventist neighbors keep Saturday as the Sabbath. They will do no work on the Sabbath and keep it holy by going to worship, eating a meal with family, taking naps, and just being with one another. They do no shopping, yard work, laundry, or cleaning house. It is a day of rest and renewal. Many of us remember when this was a norm for Christians on Sunday. When I was growing up there were no stores open. All the chores were done on Saturday, so we could keep our Sabbath holy by worshipping together as a family and eating a Sunday dinner with extended family. The older folk would sit on the porch while the children played games on the lawn. It was a peaceful, renewing time to relax and connect with each other. We don't rest any more. We barely eat meals together. Our secular world recognizes Sabbath. Different professions offer sabbatical leave. Many government offices close for the weekend to give rest to their employees. Wall St doesn't trade on the weekends, either. Yet many do not take time to connect with the Holy.

When we don't take time for God and for each other, we lose our way. Sabbath is a time to be nourished and refreshed. To enjoy what is beautiful and good. Many religious traditions including Christianity, Sabbath is a time to worship by lighting candles, singing songs of praise to God, praying, blessing our children, sharing food, telling stories and jokes. (Joke: Did you know they played baseball in the Bible? In the big inning, Eve stole first. Adam stole second. Cain struck out Abel, and the Prodigal Son

came home.) Sabbath is a time to let go of our burdens, our work, our chores, and any important projects lie. Sabbath is a time to unplug from social media. They will be there when we are finished resting. Sabbath honors the wisdom of being dormant. When we rest and become renewed, refreshed, we often work more efficiently and creatively. And we have a more positive attitude about life. Resting is necessary for us spiritually, psychologically, and physically. Stress is one of the leading health hazards today. We can buy drugs, alcohol, gadgets, creams, aromas, foods, therapies, etc. to release stress. And they can help, but for these are temporary fixes. What truly renews is connecting with the Holy.

Jesus knew this. The religious authorities were trying to define ways to define “you shall not do any work.” Was it work to feed and care for livestock? How many steps did one take during Sabbath before it was work? If someone was sick could you help them? And there were people who would find ways to get around the law, so they had to strengthen the law with more Sabbath rules. As they looked at work vs. rest, more and more rules were added. For the Jews in Jesus’ time, the day of rest became stressful trying to remember all the rules. God created the Sabbath for celebration and joy, but all these rules made Sabbath drudgery. Then Jesus steps onto the scene. As God’s Son, he knows the intent of all the Laws. It is about rest. It is meant to be a refuge, not something to which they were bound. Yet, there are things that have to be done on Sabbath, like caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, meeting the needs of another. This is the meaning of rest for people in need. This is why Jesus healed the man who was sick for thirty-eight years! I love the last line of this passage, “My Father is still working, and I am still working.” That gives me comfort, knowing that God only rested after Creation, and is still on the job! When we think we have done everything we can do, or that there is nothing we can do, God is still working, listening, and intervening in our lives. And God does not want us to be exhausted. God wants us to be filled with joy. I invite us to start with five minutes of Sabbath time a day of some kind of quiet time to connect with God and another five minutes to connect with each of our loved ones. Take time to listen. And strive to work up to a full Sabbath Day of worship to connect with God, family time to connect with family, and time for yourself to renew you physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Here are some ways to practice a simple Sabbath. I’ve adapted them from a list I found written by Wayne Muller. 1) Light a candle. Offer a simple blessing. Let the world fall away. 2) Practice Thanksgiving. Give thanks at meal times, upon waking, and going to sleep. Become more grateful for what has already been given, not with what is missing. 3) Bless your children. Place your hand on their heads and offer a blessing. Give thanks for who they are and who you yearn for them to become. Pray so they hear it. 4) Invite a Sabbath pause. Choose one common act, such as touching a door knob, and stop, take three breaths before continuing. 5) Take a walk. Let your senses guide you. Stop and “smell the roses.” Breathe in God’s goodness. Experience the beauty of the earth. 6) Pamper yourself. Take a nap, a leisurely bath, play music that relaxes. 7) Create a Sabbath box. Put your to-do list, your keys, your wallet, your cell-phone, tablet/pad, anything you really don’t need for during your Sabbath time in the box. Write down a worry or concern and drop it in the box. Let it go for now. 8) Turn off the telephone, computer, TV, any appliances. Create a time where there are no demands from our technology. 9) Prepare a Sabbath meal. Choose foods you love, put flowers on the table, take time to enjoy the dish, and give thanks for the bounty of the earth. 10) Seek companionship. Invite someone you love and trust to seek Sabbath with you. One of the most precious gifts we can give ourselves and another is quiet time and each other’s attention. 11) Reset your inner compass. Make a list of the values and principles that guide you life-both those you follow and those you would like to follow. Speak them aloud, alone, and with loved ones. 12) Surrender a problem. Sabbath reminds us that God is larger than ourselves healing the world. Turn it over to God. Let go of it and let God work, while you rest. Are there some of these that you already do to practice Sabbath. How often do you practice them? Which ones would you like to try? Could you institute a Sabbath day in your family?

Resources: *Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight* by Wayne Muller; *24/6* by Matthew Sleeth; Carmen McRae - Take Five 1961 with Dave Brubeck quartet, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNWSr6N72yQ&list=RDsNWSr6N72yQ>;

