

Deuteronomy 5

12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. **13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work. **14** But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. **15** Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Psalm 81

- 1** Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
- 2** Raise a song, sound the tambourine,
the sweet lyre with the harp.
- 3** Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day.
- 4** For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5** He made it a decree in Joseph,
when he went out over[a] the land of Egypt.
I hear a voice I had not known:
- 6** “I relieved your[b] shoulder of the burden;
your[c] hands were freed from the basket.
- 7** In distress you called, and I rescued you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.*Selah*
- 8** Hear, O my people, while I admonish you;
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
- 9** There shall be no strange god among you;

you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

10 I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

2 Corinthians 4

5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. **6** For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. **8** We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; **9** persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; **10** always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. **11** For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. **12** So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Mark 2:23-3:6

23 One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. **24** The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" **25** And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? **26** He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." **27** Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made

for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; **28** so the Human One is lord even of the sabbath.”

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. **2** They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. **3** And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” **4** Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. **5** He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. **6** The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Sermon

Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Lord open our hearts, and our lives will sing out your name: Amen.

Good morning, siblings in Christ! Thank you so much for your hospitality, and to Pastor Aaron Layne for the invitation to preach among you this morning. It's a gift and a humbling responsibility to proclaim the Gospel; indeed, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of our Lutheran forebears, referred to the sermon as "Jesus himself walking among the congregation as the spoken word." For me, it's also a joy. I love words (my wife frequently calls me a nerd), I love God, and I love the church. Most of all, I love how God uses words - after all, Jesus is THE Word - to call the church into exciting, transforming mission. Im grateful to be here at the intersection of God's people, God's mission, and God's words.

Despite my general appreciation of language, though, there's some words I tend to resist. One such word appeared many times in today's readings: Sabbath. It's one of those good words that's just so foreign, so alien to me, that I'm not quite sure how to respond. Of course, scripture tells us how to respond: nobody's working! Sounds easy enough, right?

Perhaps not. We're going to talk about sabbath in two ways today: the practical experience of sabbath in your life, and the cosmic origin of sabbath for all creation.

Let's begin by asking: why is this concept of sabbath so foreign? It seems that we're not a culture built for sabbath. Our society is designed for the constant production and consumption of goods. The main purpose for our rest is to prepare for the next workday. The main purpose of our vacation is to escape from our occupations. It seems that most people work to live and live to work. Our weekends don't release us from work but instead put us

to different work, whether at home or on the road at dawn til dusk youth athletics tournaments. Who here would describe themselves, or someone they love, as a compulsive worker? Someone who is seemingly addicted to the process of doing something, of producing something?

That's the revolutionary power of Sabbath, that God creates a world where rest is not just possible, but ingrained to the fabric of life. We rest not only because God rested in creation, but because God acted on our behalf before. Rest isn't just mimicking divine behavior; it's embodying divine trust. God will act again. We will work again. And neither God's action nor our good works will be in vain. There's always time for sabbath.

What's the structure of sabbath rest? (1) We recognize God's good work, (2) we ruminate upon God's goodness, and (3) God restores us to work on the other side of sabbath.

Sabbath begins with a recognition of God's good work.

Notice the reasoning for Sabbath given in Deuteronomy:

“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.” God's liberation of enslaved peoples, God's deliverance of religious and racial minorities from unjust oppression, is the foundation for sabbath. Sabbath is a prophetic stance against racism and prejudice, against sexism and xenophobia, against sexism and abuse of our LGBTQ+ peers. Sabbath says to the oppressor, “Your power will not last,” and to the oppressed, “God is already at work for your deliverance.”

That's the inspiration for Sabbath! God's rabid pursuit of freedom frees us to rest. Embrace Ministries is our university-sponsored campus ministry, and let me tell you: God is up to something. To enter Sabbath, we recognize God's good

work. And every time a student knocks on my door, texts or calls, emails or shouts across the quad, interrupting other work, sabbath breaks in. My students force me to sabbath. Despite the rigor of the day, full of class and work and internships and clubs, there's a constant, personal reminder every time that a student enters my office: God's future is already here. The kingdom of god is at hand in the excited students seeking divine community.

Then we ruminate upon God's goodness. That's why so many sabbath activities center upon God's Word and the faith community. Worship and prayer for for the sabbath. Singing of and discussing God's works. Reading scripture, the compilation of God's works throughout history in story form. Conversing with friends and experiencing community.

Sabbath doesn't focus on what is forbidden. Sabbath dwells is what is permitted. That's why Jesus is so adamant that humanity doesn't serve the sabbath, but the sabbath serves humanity.

Sabbath was born of God's liberation of human slaves and support of those bodies that they could rest regularly, even when wandering homeless in the wilderness. Sabbath says, "you weren't just made for work. You were also made for rest." That's why every sabbath should involve a reflective rumination in rest, a deep dive into the awareness that God's given us this day, this time, this experience, of uninterrupted, unqualified rest.

From the engine of the sabbath, then, God restores us to life-giving work. As the disciples walk through the fields, they pick grain to sustain their bodies. It is life-giving work. Jesus heals a man with a paralyzed hand, perhaps shriveled by arthritis or broken since birth. Either way, Jesus heals this man's hand, which not only restores life in his body, but here's the kicker: It enables him to work again and enter community again. In the ancient world, to the capacity for physical work was necessary for

abundant life, and any physical disabilities made someone ritually unclean.

That's the practical experience of sabbath but what about the cosmic content? After all, Jesus says "people weren't made for the sabbath. The sabbath was made for people."

Sabbath is the benevolent invasion of God's peaceful future into our troubled present. Wolfhart Pannenberg developed something he called a *theology of futurity*. Basically, what he meant was this: When Jesus said, "the Kingdom of Heaven has come near," he meant that God's future - where all things are reconciled, where sin no longer reigns, where death has lost its sting - that this future had time traveled to the present the person of Jesus. Sabbath, then, was made for humanity because in the experience of sabbath we enter the gates of heaven.

Apply to Advent's context. Ask questions about how to Sabbath.

