For the third year now, our Spiritual Formation ministries are helping us to focus on a theme during the weeks of Lent leading up to Easter. This year we are using the resource, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* by Matthew Sleeth, M.D. The theme focus is Sabbath, the fourth of the 10 Commandments. Once again, this theme will be woven through the Sunday worship sermons, Lenten study groups throughout the city, the Centenary Table, and in this devotional guide you hold in your hands.

We welcome you to read these devotions each day of the week listed. Whether alone or with family members, we believe that this additional way to enter into the Lenten experience will be a blessing to you and illuminate the themes along our congregational journey these next few weeks. These devotions were written by Rev. Jonathan Brake, Minister of Adult Spiritual Formation & Education, and also Rev. Kate May, Minister of Children’s Spiritual Formation & Education (marked by either a JB or a KM).

In addition to these devotions, you are encouraged to read the resource book, join a 4-week study group (register at 397-1343 or CentenaryOnline.com/Lent), find at least one service project to participate with as a Lenten discipline, and invite someone to attend with you at one or more of the special worship experiences listed in this guide.

Finally, we have secured a Labyrinth that will be set up in our chapel during the week of March 24-29. We invite you to come spend some time with God in this special contemplative prayer practice of walking the Labyrinth. It will be available anytime the church building is open during Holy Week.

For more information and additional details concerning our 2013 Lenten Season focus and events, please go to centenaryonline.com/lent.

Jonathan Brake
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Special Services in Lent:

Ash Wednesday Worship
February 13, 2013
7:30 p.m.

Holy Thursday Worship
March 21, 2013
7:00 p.m.

Good Friday Service of Tenebrae
March 22, 2013
7:30 p.m.

24/6 is now available for purchase in Glad Tidings Books and Gifts.
I think the world of today would go mad, just frenzied with strain and pressure, but for the blessed institution of Sunday.

- Brooke Herford

Raising teenagers is a challenge in any age. But in this Age of Information where our whole culture is addicted to hyper-multi-tasking, I find that too often my head is spinning. My daughter can sit on the sofa in front of the TV, with the radio playing music, a textbook on the right for homework, a laptop on the left keeping up with three facebook conversations, while also texting three additional conversations via her cell phone. How she can keep it all straight is beyond my comprehension. But as long as the conversations remain appropriate and her grades are good, then everything is fine, isn’t it?

My wife and I came to a conclusion early in our parenting years, that we would not schedule every moment of every day for our children, that they would only be involved in two or three activities such as church youth group, a sports team, dance, music lessons, art classes, etc. We wanted to make sure that they had “down time” with the neighborhood kids and space to be creative from their own imaginations. Still, we find that there are moments when we need to call an “unplugged” afternoon or evening when the house is allowed to go quiet – no television or music playing. No game console drumming out the same tune incessantly. We will have everyone get a book and read quietly, or draw/color, or sew/knit, or some kind of noise-untensive activity. We have found that the overstimulation of multi-tasking can take a toll on our bodies, our minds, our emotions, our relationships, and our spirits. For our family, sometimes just a challenge to mono-task is the reset that we sometimes need to correct the imbalances of a constant-motion society.

How do you, and/or the ones you love begin to act when you’ve been too long without a break from the hyperactivity around (and within)? Imagine what your family could be like with an occasional “down-time” to regroup thoughts and energy reserves. If you do not have children at home, imagine what a little bit of time available for your spouse or neighbor could mean in the long run. Now, look at your schedule for the next week. Where can you find space to schedule “down-time”? Write it on your calendar and explain to those affected by this scheduling event what you are all going to be doing (or not doing) for a hour or two break. -JB
When I was a child, I remember Sundays as a time that still had a little rest included—just a little bit. I remember when the mall would close on Sundays and restaurants that did open wouldn’t open until noon or later. You never heard a lawn mower or a hammer on a Sunday. Sports teams steered clear of the Lord’s Day (and Wednesdays). Even if you wanted to do something on a Sunday, chances are it wouldn't be available. Sundays were a time to rest. But by the time I graduated from high school, the sacred Sunday was a bygone memory. Almost every store was open, church-goers had dinner out instead of going to grandma’s house, and neighbors were washing cars or cutting grass. Those few holdouts, like Chick-Fil-A, were seen with a certain air of suspicion.

If you are old enough to remember those “good ole days” of Sundays off, recall what you would do with all that extra time. What do you miss about having a Sabbath day? How difficult was it for you to shift your thinking and habits to treating Sunday like any other day? How often do you find yourself saying, “If we could just have 26-hour days,” or “I sure could use an extra 24 hours in here somewhere”? Have you ever stopped to ask, “How come people were once able to get everything done in six days and still carve out Sundays for a different kind of rhythm?”

Dr. Matthew Sleeth points out that “the commandment about the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments that starts out with the word remember” (24/6, p.17). Some of us can still remember Sabbath, but sadly, many of us today have no recollection except stories told at family reunions.

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. What memory can you revive so as to bring some holiness back into your Sabbath day each week? Write your idea here, share it with your family or friends, and put a little bit of holiness back into your week. -JB
“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
- Jesus (Matthew 11:28)

A few years ago a friend of mine was diagnosed with sleep apnea. His doctor gave him one of those crazy machines to sleep with and he began using it every night. As he was telling me all of this I asked him if the machine was making any difference. I was curious if he was feeling more rested. He responded by telling me that no he was actually feeling more tired, but followed up with something his doctor had told him. The doctor told him not to expect immediate well-rested feelings. The doctor gave him the bittersweet news that he had been sleep-deprived for so long that it might take up to two years of getting restful sleep before he might begin feeling well-rested.

As I read 24/6 this statement from my friend’s doctor kept coming to my mind. You see I enter this journey of Sabbath finding with you not as a person who has any great wisdom, but as a person who is desperately Sabbath-deprived. At the beginning of December I took a Sabbath day and I rested and stopped just long enough to realize that I needed a lot more sabbath. I sensed that like my sleep-deprived friend, it might take a long time of regularly scheduled stop time before it might start making a proactive difference in my day to day life.

So as we take the first steps on the Lenten path that prepares us for the miracle of Easter I will focus on recognizing and admitting that I have a problem. Hello, my name is Kate and I am desperately Sabbath-deprived… - KM

God help me today to recognize the need I have for Sabbath in my life.
Help me to lift up the burden I carry so that you may step beneath it with me. Amen.
On the morning of the seventh day [of creation],
God makes nothing out of something.
Rest is brought into being.

- Dr. Matthew Sleeth (24/6, p.23)

Always in the past, when I’ve read the Genesis account of creation, I’ve noticed that on the seventh day “God rested” from his work. But I will never read that passage the same way again, for Dr. Sleeth has given me a completely fresh way of reading Genesis 2:2. It was on the seventh day of creation that God brought rest into being – in other words, God created rest. Just as God created for us air and water, light and dark, plants and algae, fish and birds and beasts, God also created for us rest. Sleeth says, “The word Sabbath means ‘cease from working.’ The concept is holy … the point is to stop on that day and look for God” (24/6, p.24)

For generations God’s People rested on the seventh day of the week. The early church still went to synagogue or Temple for Sabbath worship on the seventh day. However, from the very beginning of the Church, Christians would gather on Sunday for communion and worship because that was the day of resurrection. Now, most Christian denominations consider Sunday to be the Sabbath day for worship and rest. Yet, as clergy, I have often struggled with making Sunday my own Sabbath, for Sunday is a work day on my calendar! Along with health care workers, food service employees, and so many in retail, Sunday is a work day. In recent years I have been more diligent in making my day off (currently Fridays) a day for rest and to refocus on God.

Whether your Sabbath day is on Sunday or another day, what can you begin doing this week to create rest for yourself and your loved ones? How can you safeguard this rest time so that it becomes a habit – one with great benefit for yourself and beyond? During the Exodus, God’s children were instructed to gather twice the manna on day 6, so that they wouldn’t have to work on day 7 for their living. What tasks can you plan to complete on the day prior to your Sabbath in order to avoid having to do much (if any) work during the time you are to be focused primarily on God? Be intentional this week and plan your day 7 as preparation for the day 7 Sabbath. - JB
In seventh grade I joined the track and field team. We practiced and prepared for weeks until the arrival of the first track meet. I was running the 440 meters – just one lap around. Pumped full of adrenaline and ready to prove myself, I took my place at the starting line. At the sound of the cap gun we were off. I knew how to pump my arms for momentum. I knew how to run off of the front of my shoes where the spikes would grip the asphalt. Around the turn we went and one look over my shoulder confirmed that I was still out front in the lead. Down the back straightaway I even increased my lead over some of the other runners. In turn three I pumped my arms and legs. I could see the crowd as I came into turn four. Then I could hear the crowd as I came out of turn four. The finish line was now in sight. But something happened. My hands started to feel tingly. My legs turned to spaghetti. I had to slow down just to keep my balance. And one-by-one the other runners passed me and crossed the line before I could get there. I could hardly even catch my breath. I had never felt like that before.

The next day at practice my coach explained that I couldn’t run the entire 440m at top speed. He introduced me to the way a runner conserves energy on the back straightaway and then finishes strong. He taught me how to rest even in the middle of the race! This is the same lesson God teaches us when we are commanded to rest, to observe the Sabbath. In the midst of the race of life, we need to learn how to conserve energy so we can finish strong and not “hit the wall.” Dr. Sleeth calculated that if we rest by taking a Sabbath each week, 52 weeks each year, this adds up to over eleven years in a typical lifespan. I find it interesting that the difference in life expectancy between social groups who don’t observe a Sabbath and those that do is about eleven years. We have a choice, to either use up those eleven years as we go, or save them up on the backstretch so we have them available to add on at the end of life.

Think about the times when you pushed too hard. Maybe it was needling a sibling until you received an unwanted response. Maybe it was pulling those all-nighters in college and muddling through classes the next day. Maybe it was spending too much too fast until there were more bills than paychecks. Maybe it was ignoring your body’s warning signs until a simple cold turned into a doctor visit or even a hospital stay. Ruth Haley Barton says that “There is something deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our existence as human beings—physical bodies in a world of time and space” (Sacred Rhythms, p.138). Take a moment and make a list of all the symptoms you may be ignoring in your body, your relationships, or your spirit that something is not quite right. How might you begin to address these symptoms and find ways to rest on the back straightaway of your week (and life)? - JB
A few years ago I felt led to help my congregation see and know Jesus more clearly. After all, if we were going to call ourselves “Christians,” we should be sure we know of whom we have derived our label! So, for an entire year in worship, we made our way through the gospel of that lectionary year. One of the surprising discoveries I made as I studied and prepared a sermon week after week was how often the attitudes and actions of the Pharisees reminded me of the attitudes and actions of church goers today.

Have you ever noticed that the altercations between Jesus and the religious leaders were almost never about the miracle performed, but over the audacity of doing any kind of work on the Sabbath—even work that helped and benefitted others? Finally, Jesus had to set the record straight: “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NLT). We NEED the Sabbath. Sabbath was created for our good.

We often fall into one of two traps about Sabbath—either we simply treat it like any other day, or we load it down with so many rules, it becomes a burden. In either case, we are not actually observing Sabbath. Look at your own pattern … how do you treat the Sabbath? Is it not even an afterthought? Or is it a drudgery? What would have to change for you in order for the Sabbath to become a cup of cold water to your thirsty soul? Choose one or two things to do differently on your weekly Sabbath day. Share this with a family member or a friend. Perhaps even invite them to join with you in observing Sabbath.  - JB
“Keep the Sabbath day holy.
Don’t pursue your own interests on that day,
but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord’s holy day.”

(Isaiah 58:13 NLT)

Some of my favorite memories are from when each of my children were infants. I had a weekly pattern on the Sunday Sabbath. After Sunday School, worship, and lunch, I would take the little bundle of joy with me to the armchair and turn on the NFL game. I would cradle the little one, laying their head on my chest and together we would take a Sabbath nap. I miss those days, although now I can often find a cat willing to rest with me through the game!

Observing Sabbath rest means different things to different people. Dr. Sleeth says “The meaning of rest to a man who cannot walk is to get up and go. The meaning of rest to the hungry is food. The meaning of rest to Peter’s mother-in-law was not only to be healed from her fever, but to offer hospitality to her son-in-law’s famous employer” (24/6, p.58). Often, Sabbath rest is simply taking a break from what is standard living every other day of the week and engaging in whatever gives us energy and life.

Make a quick review of your work week. What drains you of energy? What are you unable to do all week that you know would recharge your batteries or give you a new lease on the upcoming week? Make a serious effort to incorporate that activity (or break from an activity) into your Sabbath so that it’s a day of renewal. - JB
“You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 
but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of complete rest, 
an official day for holy assembly. 
It is the Lord’s Sabbath day, and it must be observed wherever you live.”

(Leviticus 23:3)

About two years ago, a woman I worked with began teaching yoga classes. Yoga was something that had always interested me and she was teaching a class on Wednesday afternoons from 2-3 p.m. I decided to try it out. I figured it allowed me to do something good for my body by strengthening and stretching it while at the same time giving me the opportunity to pause in the middle of my week and step away from everything for an hour.

When it came time for my first class I was terribly anxious. I had been a runner and a dancer. My body didn’t know how to do this strange in-between thing called yoga that was both the same and completely different from anything I had experienced before. All of that on top of the self-consciousness I felt thinking about what the others in the class would think as they watched me.

After that first class I had three revelations:

1. Just as our instructor assured us, no one was paying any attention to anyone else.
2. I felt so good after an hour of yoga I knew I needed to keep this up.
   I kept going for awhile and then life got in the way. I tried some yoga DVDs even yoga on-demand on TV, but nothing gave me the same feeling I got from being a part of that Wednesday afternoon class. This was my third yoga revelation:
3. Sometimes it is only possible to be totally self-focused with the help of others.

This week I will focus on remembering and re-discovering the joy, rest, and self-awareness I found in my yoga class because with that came a connectedness to the person God is leading me to be. - KM

God help me today to seek out community who can help to connect me with myself in such a way that I am also intimately connected with you. Amen.
The unexamined life is not worth living.

- Socrates

When I was in school, and later in professional development seminars, I had occasional opportunities to complete personal assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the DiSC assessment. Each of these tools is designed to give the user a deeper sense of who they are, especially where we are blind to our own tendencies. As scientifically-based as the instruments are, there is already a tool available to us, designed by the Creator himself—Stop Day.

One of the purposes of the Sabbath is to give us a chance to take a step back from the person we are all week long. It’s an opportunity to see ourselves in a different light, with another kind of lens. When we come to worship, we enter into God’s presence, knowing that God already knows us fully, and still loves us in spite of it all. As we connect with the Holy, something happens to us. We have a chance to remember whose we are, why we exist, and why God made us.

In the rat-race of everyday activities, it’s so easy to lose sight of ourselves. So many other people define who we are – parents, spouse, boss, children, co-workers, neighbors, and even friends. We need time to step out of those expectations and refocus our self-image to stay grounded in God’s perception and love for us. This Sabbath, step aside for a few minutes and ask yourself, “Who am I, really?” “How does God see me?” “Where do I find myself being filled back up?” “How’s my attitude?” “In what tangible ways am I loving God and loving others?” “How might God want me to act differently this upcoming week?” - JB
I don’t have to tell you that we live in a non-stop culture. We don’t have to reside in “The City That Never Sleeps” to at least know what that feels like. As a minister, the usual Sabbath for Christians, Sunday, can often be one of my busiest. Therefore, I take another day off and work Sunday through Thursday at the church. I work into my schedule certain Sabbath-keeping practices such as Scripture reading and meditation, prayer and silence, even service toward my family in the kitchen or laundry room! But recently, I returned home on a Friday morning after dropping the kids off at school and realized just how fatigued I was physically. So, I crawled back into bed and set an alarm for 90 minutes.

Matthew Sleeth, as a medical doctor, understands our need to rest for our health. He writes, “If we are to treat our bodies as temples, we must allow time for physical, mental, and spiritual recovery from the labors of our week” (24/6, p.77). Not that long ago, families would gather for Sunday dinner together. This was a time to love and be loved, to share and laugh, to take a “mental health day.” How often do you think of the Sabbath as a day of personal renewal for total health—body, mind, soul, and relationships? Perhaps we think of worship as a time of spiritual recovery, but what about the rest of the day? How can you make your next Sabbath a time of rest, an actual day of releasing heavy burdens so as to alleviate some of your ongoing weariness? - JB
Anyone who becomes as humble as this little child
is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

- Jesus (Matthew 18:4 NLT)

Most of us remember a time, when we were children, that the Sabbath was a simpler day. Actually, as children, life in general was a simpler time, devoid of many concerns that rule the days of adulthood. But Sundays here in the United States were still a guarded and hallowed time. There was a cultural expectation that everyone would slow down, have some rest, be with people instead of work assignments. Dr. Sleeth writes, When Jesus said, “we have to become like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” was he referring to a child’s sense of time? Was he pointing us to that period of our lives when we could live in the moment? (24/6, p.93). As much as we would like to, we cannot go back to those days, however, we can learn to act in these days the way we perhaps did in our childhood – with more abandon, wonder, awareness and appreciation. We can take steps to set aside the worries and focus more on the moment.

As a child I was hardly ever concerned about what others thought of me, where my next meal was coming from or whether my parents loved me. (I know this is not the experience of everyone, but most children don’t learn to worry about these things until they are teenagers). I could go out into the street and play with my neighbors a game of baseball, ride bicycles, jump rope, pretend to be cowboys and Indians and so much more. As an adult, I need to reclaim some of that attitude of leisure and relationship building. I need to find ways to become as humble as a little child – at least one day a week.

Imagine what Sabbath would be like if we put aside all striving and ambition. If we sought others to spend time with in a laid-back, just-being-together sort of way. If we visited a nursing care facility to bring a flower and a smile to someone forgotten. If we called up an old friend to hear their voice for a while instead of just a quick note on facebook about unnecessary things. If we invited family members into the kitchen to take part in making the meal – then take part in enjoying the meal as a group. If we pulled a game off the shelf and read back through instructions forgotten long ago. If we just enjoyed a day of “free time” without having anything required to do. If you’re like me, you’re reading this thinking “That sounds nice, but isn’t likely to happen.” Why not? What if we planned our week in such a way that nothing gets pushed off onto Sunday, but rather everything gets pushed off of the Sabbath calendar so that this kind of space is created intentionally? If Sabbath is to become our reality, it must be planned for and protected, especially in today’s culture. “Filling in every Sunday on our calendar with “FOR THE LORD” in permanent ink changes our perspective” (24/6, p.126). What specifically do you need to do this week in order to prepare for the Sabbath to spend the day like a little child? And maybe even experience a little piece of the Kingdom of God?

- JB
My Saturday “Stop Days” launched me on a journey toward the three Rs of Sabbath: rest, renewal, and reverence.

- Dr. Matthew Sleeth (24/6, p.101)

I recently helped lead a group of men and women through a 4-day, mostly silent, retreat. We were practicing a contemplative “Way of the Heart” patterned after Henri Nouwen’s book of the same name. There are three parts to the way of the heart: solitude, silence, and deep prayer. Each day we looked a little closer at each of these aspects. An immersion experience such as a retreat creates the opportunity to learn and discover a closer walk with God. However, it became very real to us by the time we were packing to return home that this kind of experience would be next to impossible in the hustle and bustle of our 24/7 world. And then I read to the group a passage from Dr. Sleeth: “On Sabbath we come to rest, and we draw near to the Lord. We retreat. We spend time together. It is an appropriate time for prayer, church, and Bible reading. But something even more intimate happens on Stop Day. There is time for just being with the Lord” (24/6, p.125). And there it is—each week God has given us a built-in time for retreat. A built-in time for rest, renewal and reverence. A built-in time that we can find for personal solitude (or group/family solitude), silence (or at least no background noise) and deep prayer. Each Sabbath, we are given the time necessary to “Seek, and you will find,” as Jesus instructs us (Matthew 7:7 ESV).

Often it’s the finer things in life that we don’t realize hold such importance until we have been able to experience them over a long period of time. The way to do so is to take that weekly retreat. So, bring out your calendar. Determine if Sunday is indeed your day for Sabbath (it is for most Christians) or choose another appropriate day. Every week that there is nothing scheduled, go ahead and mark it now “FOR THE LORD” or “SPIRITUAL RETREAT” through the end of the year. Don’t use pencil, which means tentative, use pen which means officially scheduled. This way, those days are now unavailable for filling up with something that keeps you busy. The days that have something scheduled, determine if 1) the activity can be rescheduled to another day, or 2) your Sabbath time can be scheduled on a different day that week—and mark it now. Share your new weekly calendar item with those whom it will affect directly such as family members, and those who can help you keep it as a holy time such as close friends. It takes at least six weeks of repetition for an activity such as this to begin to form as a habit, so don’t get discouraged if your Sabbath time at first seems difficult. This desire for weekly retreat with the Lord will grow over time until you feel a great absence if it is missed. Any relationship worth having needs time to grow deeper—the same is true in our relationship with God. - JB
Sometimes ministry, like life, can drag you down. Sometimes you find yourself in the midst of so many heart-breaking situations that it is hard to let go and focus on the joy in life. As I made my way home, one night several years ago, I was feeling incredibly burdened when the song “You Never Let Go” by the David Crowder Band began playing on my car stereo. Through that song God spoke to me. The title of the song succinctly describes its message. God never lets go of us. This in itself is a very comforting message, however it was not the message God had for me that night. As I listened, it was as if God was whispering to my heart, “I never let go and because I don’t, you can!” It was like the proverbial light bulb came on in my head. These burdens I was carrying were not my own and although God may be asking me to help bear those burdens in my professional life in ministry I could let go when I need to. God was also always carrying those burdens and was carrying them with more strength and power than I could ever dream of having.

This week as I continue my practice of Sabbath taking, I will remember that there are times when I can let go and be reminded that God is the one in control. -KM

God please help me to lay my burdens in your capable hands today so that I might be rested, renewed, and filled with reverence in your presence. Amen.
You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 
but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of complete rest, 
an official day for holy assembly. 

It is the Lord’s Sabbath day, and it must be observed wherever you live. 

(Leviticus 23:3 NLT)

A few years ago our kitchen oven died. So, we went looking for a new one to match the same brand and design as the refrigerator. It just so happens that the model we found came with a special feature called “Sabbath Time.” Being a pastor, I thought this was most appropriate for our house. The Sabbath Time feature was simply the way to tell the oven when to come on and when to go off. It can be used, presumably, when you are away at worship and want to return to a house with a cooked and ready-to-eat casserole or baked chicken. Excited about our new oven feature, we decided to try it out. And for the first time, we did something that we had only read about in the book of Exodus—we prepared our Sunday lunch on Saturday evening. Before leaving for church the next morning, we simply had to set the oven’s Sabbath Time and move the dish from the refrigerator to the oven. What do you know?—less work on Sunday, more time with each other and for rest.

However, I must confess that we don’t use the oven’s Sabbath Time feature nearly as often as we should. But the concept of Saturday preparation for Sunday rest has always been part of our family’s rhythm—in some ways. Housework is done throughout the week and finished up on Saturday. But school homework is often put off until Sunday night. Yard work is finished on Saturday or waits until the following week. But sometimes we make little shopping trips on Sunday afternoons because we didn’t get that done on Saturday. I’m now wondering what else we can complete during the week or on Saturday to free up our Sunday to be more of a time for actually observing Sabbath?

I challenge you to start making a list of all the things you do on your Sabbath. Just carry around a piece of paper and pen. Maybe each hour, stop and write down everything you have done in the past 60 minutes. At the end of the day, take stock of your Sabbath. On another piece of paper make two columns: “Sabbath” and “Not Sabbath.” Anything that you (or your family) did during the day that was rest, renewal, or reverence can be listed under Sabbath. Everything else can go under Not Sabbath. Some items will be different for you than they are for me. There are some things that you do for fun or for relationship renewal that I would consider work, and vice versa. The goal of this exercise is not to measure your Sabbath against some external criteria, but to seek your own heart and find what makes Sabbath a life-giving time for you and your loved ones. Now, take the Not Sabbath list and schedule all of those activities to be completed during the next six days, so your seventh day is more fully a true Sabbath. After completing this exercise for several weeks, we will be better observers of the Lord’s Day, with all the graceful benefits that are promised to those who keep the Sabbath holy. - JB
Lord, through all generations you have been our home!
Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, 
from beginning to end, you are God.

(Psalm 90:1-2 NLT)

Matthew Sleeth speaks about our current culture when he writes, “One problem is that we have no roots. The average American moves every seven years” (24/6, p.106). Looking back on my life since marriage, we are slightly above average and hoping to put down deeper roots in our future to make up for all of our previous relocations. In eighteen years, we have moved 10 times—one move was literally around the corner! Two of the houses where we lived are no longer standing, so we can’t even drive by and reminisce. When this is our reality, and that of a growing number of Americans, we long for some place to call “home,” something that is familiar enough to go back to. Something that can ground us as a people, a family, a child of God. If that can’t be a place, it can be a practice, or better yet, a person.

Dr. Sleeth says that “At the center of our constant shifting and moving is an ache to be back in God’s presence” (24/6, p.108) I’m learning that developing a means to be in God’s presence is essential for my life and for my ministry in Spiritual Formation at Centenary. But beyond my own need is a desire to teach my children to have a practice and a Person to ground themselves—a means of “putting down roots” in a highly mobile society. As United Methodist Preacher’s Kids, they already struggle with the question “Where are you from?” in the same way as a military brat. And I recently heard that their generation can expect to change jobs an average of 27 times during their working years! Clearly, physical roots aren’t possible, but God has provided even for this need. For forty years the Hebrew people wandered in the desert during the Exodus—that’s two generations or more. In order to keep them grounded, God instructed them to “keep the Sabbath holy.” How? By coming to the house of the Lord each week on Stop Day.

Where someone is from (or considers to be home) is often used in human relations to help us define a person (she’s from the Midwest; he’s from Paris). What a difference it would make for us to go home to our Father’s house each and every week. Think about your children or grandchildren. What can you do now to help them develop a weekly Sabbath, a place and time to reconnect with the deepest roots of all, the creator of the universe? If they are still living in your house, then clearly you can make it your family habit to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Proverbs 22 says, “Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won’t depart from it” (CEB). If your children are grown and out of the house, then perhaps one of your Sabbath activities could be making a weekly connection with them. If they live close enough, invite them over for a family meal. If the distance is too great, then make a Sabbath phone call or better yet, a video call through Google or Skype! In any case, think about the possibilities of making a direct, personal connection with those coming after you. Set your own habits and share them with your loved ones. Create memories of the Sabbath so that no matter where they live (or wander), there will be a means whereby they can remember the Sabbath—and call it “home.” - JB
It is good to take a Sabbath; it is godly to give one.

(24/6, p.134)

“Sabbath and giving are two sides of the same coin. … Christianity links them when the offering plate is placed on the table with the elements of the Lord’s Supper. This is no accident” (24/6, p.133). Have you ever thought of this? Just as we are instructed to give a portion of our increase into the work of the Lord through the church, so we are to give a portion of our time into the work of the Lord through our Sabbath observance. The early Methodist movement required that every member would participate in a small group. And as a participant in a small group, it was expected that tithing would include both time and money. John Wesley expected a tithe—a tenth—of one’s money to be given in the offering plate and a tenth of one’s time to be given to prayer and scripture reading/meditation. There are 168 hours in a week. If we were to give a tenth of our time, it would come out to almost 17 hours, roughly the waking hours of one day—a Sabbath!

Dr. Sleeth says “Giving money to others makes no worldly sense. It is therefore on equal footing with the Sabbath” (24/6, p.134). Of course it makes no worldly sense—the world says “time is money.” But Jesus said, “Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them” (Matthew 6:19-20, CEB). In heaven there is no time and there is no need for money or possessions. There is only abundance. As we grow in our thinking about giving money, we discover that God will provide for our needs and give us a stronger passion to give even more. The same is true of our time. When we discover that the money we have truly belongs to God (100% of it) we can likewise discover that the time we have belongs to God as well (100% of it).

Therefore, how do we give away our time for the good of the Lord? We know that giving money to those who cannot repay is a godly activity. How about giving our time to those who cannot return it? Talk with your spouse, children, family, friends, church members and others to discover ways that together you can give away your time for the Lord. Maybe it’s coming on Sunday evenings this summer to plant and harvest in the Food Bank Garden. Maybe it’s volunteering one month for Love Thy Neighbor after Sunday worship. Maybe it’s creating personal care packets to send to college students or military personnel. I once had a church member who was greatly restricted in driving a car and she didn’t really enjoy talking on the phone, but she started a card ministry sending personalized cards to church members who were sick, having a birthday, or celebrating an anniversary. There was no end to the stories of blessings from the way this lady shared her time with others. So, I encourage you to think outside-the-box for ways to give God a day of your week free from self-focus so that God and others can truly be your focus and blessing each week. - JB
Therefore, since the promise that we can enter into rest is still open, let’s be careful so that none of you will appear to miss it. … We who have faith are entering the rest.

(Hebrews 4:1, 3 CEB)

Life is full of deadlines. It’s not uncommon for me to get caught up in the business of life and miss an important cut-off-date. Sometimes that opportunity is lost forever, but sometimes I’m given another chance. In my work here at the church I use a piece of software to keep track of my tasks. A very helpful feature is for recurring tasks, those that come up weekly or monthly. Once I have completed that task for this particular time segment, I mark it as “complete” and it sets the date forward for the next deadline of this particular task. There are some activities of that task that are lost for good—like an announcement for an event that is about to happen—and there are some activities that can be included next go-around. I’ve found that I truly appreciate this little feature on my computer, as it sometimes gives me another chance.

The writer of Hebrews lets us know that as long as we are living, we still have a chance to enter into the rest that God offers us, to spend quality time with the maker of the universe. Dr. Sleeth puts it this way: God “gives us both the place and the time to celebrate with him. Fortunately for us, Sabbath occurs week after week, so we are given thousands of opportunities to get it right” (24/6, p.142). Perhaps during this study on Sabbath, the thought has crossed your mind that you have already missed so much by neglecting the rest and renewal available in observing the fourth commandment from Mt. Sinai. But there is good news! Another Sabbath is coming, it’s just hours away! The only question is whether this time you will miss it yet again or enter into the rest that is offered.

Where will you be this Sunday? Will you find yourself in worship? What about Sunday school? Will you allow yourself to accept and enjoy the gift of time that God wants to lavish upon us? Will you slow down, stop the work, stop the hurry, stop the madness of life? Will you find ways to be in solitude with God? Or perhaps be in community with others in God’s presence? Dr. Sleeth shares that “Stepping into the Sabbath usually involves stepping out of other things. In general, I avoid any commercial activity on my Sabbath” (24/6, p.152). A common theme in these devotions is that we must be intentional about our Sabbath habits. When we plan for it and prepare for it, Sabbath happens. Just because you have not planned or prepared for Sabbath in the past, doesn’t mean that you are bound to keep repeating the same pattern. This week, why not start a new habit of getting the Sabbath right? -JB
One of the ministries that I’m blessed to be a part of is the Created by God ministry that teaches a faith-based curriculum on human sexuality to 4-6 graders and their parents. This is a ministry of our conference that gives me the opportunity to lead weekend learning times in churches throughout western North Carolina. One of the activities we do with the students is what we call the decision making chart. We create a grid that allows us to work through a decision as a group noting what the choices are, what the consequences are, what the influences are, and then who ultimately gets to decide. When we talk about consequences we always start with a discussion of how consequences can be both good and bad. We stress that consequences are what happens as a result of a choice.

As I read through the texts from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hebrews for this week’s sermon I felt like I was working through a decision making chart. The situation is life and living it. My choices are to take a Sabbath or keep working. If I take a Sabbath I get the positive consequences of rest, joy, and renewed strength. If I don’t rest I get the negative consequences of unquenchable fire which definitely does not sound pleasant! Ultimately, in all of the decision making charts, we get to the piece of the chart about who decides. As much as I would like to change it the ultimate decision maker is always me! So in this decision making chart it is me who has to decide what to do.

This week I will take responsibility for my own Sabbath taking. I will take the time to get my work done so that I can rest and experience joy and renewed strength. -KM

God please give me the desire for Sabbath so strongly that I will push through fatigue and procrastination to get my work done so that I might revel in the Sabbath. Amen.
Several years ago I began keeping a prayer journal. This has grown way beyond a little book where I write down names and circumstances to pray about. It has truly become a spiritual journal for me where I record insights received from scripture readings, sermons, songs, and more. There are pages with doodling of images that God has given me. But last year I decided to put more into my spiritual journaling in order to get more out of it. I purchased a book about journaling and learned to divide my journal into sections. One section contains personal goals for the year. Another contains my daily and weekly spiritual rhythms (including Sabbath), and another section I call “God-Sightings.” This is where I jot down anything that reminds me of God. Dr. Sleeth writes, “Sabbath is about awe and wonder—a reflection of God. If you aren’t seeing miracles on a daily basis, it might be helpful to take notes” (24/6, p.154).

Looking back at my journal now, I see where I was in a small group meeting sharing about our lives and praying with each other when a doe and fawn walked out of the woods and stood a few feet away from us on the other side of the window “as if God was saying ‘I’m right here listening.’” I made a note when the children were tender and encouraging to one another. On another day it was a flock of geese flying in formation through the morning sunlight. These are “God-moments” that can be relived on my Sabbath day as I find a quiet place to read back over what God has said in my daily devotion times as well as how God has shown up throughout my week. I once heard the question raised—How many times did Moses walk past that same bush before he noticed it was on fire? In the busy, distracted lives we live, I’m sure there are many times that we just miss the presence of God. We need Sabbath, just to refocus and look closer.

As a Sabbath day becomes more routine and holy, we will discover that our focus and vision notice more of God’s presence throughout the week. I encourage you to find some way to take notes of where God is moving in your life. Maybe it’s just a little pocket notebook you carry with you, an app on your smart phone that lets you make a simple list, a new experience of online blogging your encounters, etc. The means is up to you, the practice of observing and celebrating God daily is the main part this exercise. Have you ever met someone who just seems to see God all around them? It’s because they are living in the moment with the Living God. We too, can live in the moment, or to say it more clearly, we can live each day in the Kingdom of God where heaven and earth interconnect. We can experience a taste of Sabbath throughout the week because we have stopped to listen and receive on each Lord’s Day. - JB
I started off by saying that I have no wisdom on this subject of Sabbath. I have written these devotions on the night before they are due. The same night that I finished the 24/6 book. The same day that I went in to work early and stayed late for a meeting. The bright spots of this day have been the moments with my family. Singing and dancing in worship with my son, taking a bike ride together, and sitting down at the table together to eat. The text from Malachi speaks of children turning to parents and parents turning to children. As I have examined what Sabbath means to me I find that time with my family and friends is key. So I will make a point of sitting down to eat with my family. I will stop and really listen when my husband shares about his day. I will not check emails on my phone when playing with my son. I will help those who I so desperately love feel that they are a priority in my life. It may be only a few small things on the way to living a life directed by a God who commands Sabbath, but I’ve got to start somewhere.

This week I may not have a full day of Sabbath but I will find Sabbath moments with my family every day. - KM

God help me to re-direct my energies in such a way that I can be wholly present with my family. In this way I practice being wholly present with you. Amen.
If you honor [the Sabbath] by refusing ‘business as usual,’
making money, running here and there—
Then you’ll be free to enjoy God!

(Isaiah 28:13-14 MSG)

Life is so busy and we are so trained to be “productive” that we even plan our vacations to exhaust us. How many times have you (or someone you know) said “Now I need a vacation to rest up from my vacation”? A few years ago we took a family trip. When we arrived and had dragged all the luggage into the house, my wife and I decided to take off our wristwatches and leave them in the suitcase. We didn’t set alarms to get up in the morning. We didn’t pay attention to how late we stayed up at night. We ate meals when our stomachs began to groan. We did turn on the Weather Channel a couple of times to plan our outdoor vs. indoor activities, but other than that, the tube stayed dark. Soft music, getting lost in a novel, and just playing with the children dominated our vacation week. That’s when we discovered what real vacation is.

The weekly Sabbath can be like a mini vacation. For many of us, we plan out our Sabbath day to keep us on the go because we don’t know anything else—thus we miss the whole point. When we can get to the place where Sabbath is void of demands and becomes a time of deep communion with God, God’s children, our loved ones, and even just ourselves, we will have found true vacation. And we will have discovered the blessing that God has always intended Sabbath to be. Dr. Sleeth comments that “It is a wonderful thing to luxuriate in the knowledge that the Sabbath stretches out in front of us. I like to think of it as a magical time room. When we close the door and throw the latch, the world outside comes to a halt” (24/6, p.162).

This is God’s plan for you. This is God’s plan for your family and friends. This is God’s plan for the church. This is God’s plan for all of society. Why is this God’s plan? Because God loves us so much that he wants the very best for us. God knows that Sabbath is not just a rule to get in the way of our living—Sabbath is actually the rule which gives us life so that we can truly live. I pray that you have wrestled with the fourth commandment during these last few weeks. I hope that you have found ways to guard your Sabbath time. I know that as Sabbath becomes a weekly habit for you, life will take on new meaning. You will be able to face each day during the week with renewed energy and passion. You will look with anticipation toward the next Sabbath Day because you have found in it rest, renewal, and reverence. So, welcome to the Sabbath Life! “Remember the Sabbath Day and treat it as holy” (Exodus 20:8, CEB). - JB
Food Drive for Loaves and Fishes | Sunday, February 3 – Sunday, March 31

As the temperatures drop, our shelves become bare as we offer food for those in need. Our Loaves and Fishes ministry provides weekly food and financial assistance to those in need. Please pick up a white bag in the baskets at the entrances. Each bag will have information on what type of food we need and where to drop off your donation.

Samaritans Ministry

During the month of March, we provide volunteers to spend the night at the shelter in groups of six. This is a 7pm – 7am commitment for one night that will allow you to see the power of the ministry to the homeless. Throughout the evening and morning you will participate in the Christian care and hope Samaritan Ministry offers. Dates we need over night volunteers are March 4-7, 12-13, 18-21, 25-28.

Prison Ministry | Sunday, March 3 from 5:30 pm to 8:45 pm

Please join us for a night to participate in an evening worship service with our brothers of the Forsyth County Jail/Prison Ministry. The worship service is an amazing experience that will change your outlook on how God is at work in our correctional facilities. No special training is required.

Stop Hunger Now | Sunday, March 10 at 2:00 pm

This nationally known mission program is an immensely fun, hands-on and rewarding experience for anyone of any age. We will gather at the auditorium to package 10,000 meals for those in all around the world. To read more about this amazing ministry please visit www.stophungernow.org

Family Mission Day at Habitat | Saturday, March 16 from 9:00 am to 11:30 pm

Join us as we reach out with Habitat for Humanity for a day of fellowship and mission events. All ages are welcome and no experience is needed. Please register with Rev. Maria King in order to organize supplies and work projects.