

A FOUR-PART SERMON SERIES ON SABBATH BASED ON THE BOOK
24/6: A PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER LIFE BY DR. MATTHEW SLEETH

Preached by Rev. Jonathan Brake at the Wednesday lunch program called *Centenary Table* during Lent 2013
Centenary United Methodist Church, Winston-Salem NC

Resources used in this series

24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life by Matthew Sleeth
Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller
Spiritual Rhythms in Community by Keith Meyer
Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun
Sacred Time: Living in the Presence of God by Jim Hampton & Amy Brothers

Permission is granted to use this sermon material as long as you give credit to the authors/sources cited where applicable. Much of this series draws on my own personal experience which you may also use as long as you cite it as a story shared by Rev. Jonathan Brake. You also may contact me at jbrake@centenary-ws.org.

A HOLY WASTE OF TIME SERIES

Sermon 1) WE DON'T WASTE TIME ANYMORE

I came home from work recently & found my children
 laying side by side on the front lawn,
 staring up into the partly cloudy sky
 just wastin' time
Can you still remember those days?
Life was simpler then - in many ways
When we grow up - we don't waste time anymore
 What a shame!
Thomas Merton defines prayer as - "Wasting Time With God"
 which is of course a little bit of a play on words
 because any time spent with God is *never* wasted

This Lenten season here at Centenary we've been talking about Sabbath
 The weekly time of rest
 A break from work
 A time to worship together
 A time for quiet, solitude, scripture reading
 A time to reconnect with loved ones

The subtitle of Dr. Matthew Sleeth's book *24/6*,
says Sabbath is *a prescription for a healthier, happier life*

My first year of Junior High – I joined the track & field team
practiced and prepared for weeks – finally, first track meet
I was running the 440 meters – just one lap around.
Pumped full of adrenaline – 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 – one look over my shoulder confirmed –
I was still out front.
Down the back straightaway I even increased my lead.
In turn three I pumped my arms & 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 tingle
My legs turned to spaghetti
I had to slow down just to keep my balance.
And one-by-one the other runners passed me
& 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
I couldn't run the entire 440m at top speed.
He introduced me to the way a runner conserves energy on the back straightaway
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."

[Sabbath, p.1]

*In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work
and rest.*

All life requires a rhythm of rest.

We have lost this essential rhythm. Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something – anything – is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want to rest, our lives are in danger.

For want of rest, our lives are in danger.
Our lives are like my oxygen-deprived muscles –
wobbly, unsteady, incapable of doing any more

It's been said – you can tell what's important to someone
by looking at their calendar – how they spend their time
My calendar is on my phone –
You can't see it from your seat, but each activity is a block of color
Some days – very little white showing
Like Muller said in "Sabbath" – I can take pride in a full day of activity
Just viewing my calendar
is like looking over my shoulder to the runners **BEHIND** me!

Many of you are retired.
But I've heard you talk around your tables.
There's still a pride in staying busy
"I'm busier now than when I was working full time!"
We don't waste time anymore – to our own detriment.

[Deuteronomy 5:12-15, CEV]

¹² Show respect for the Sabbath Day – it belongs to me.¹³ You have six days when you can do your work,¹⁴ but the seventh day of the week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day – not you, your children, your oxen or donkeys or any other animal, not even those foreigners who live in your towns. And don't make your slaves do any work. ¹⁵ This special day of rest will remind you that I reached out my mighty arm and rescued you from slavery in Egypt.

God has rescued you and me – from enslavement to constant activity
God has given us a gift – time for rest, renewal, and delight
But we must open the gift
We must take out the garment
We must put it on, like a Jewish Prayer Shawl

The gift, is wasting time with God
The gif, is life-giving
Not using the gift, is destructive to life

[Sabbath - p.2]

A "successful" life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks.

The Chinese pictograph for "busy" =
two characters: *heart* and *killing*.

"I'm so busy" - becomes a source of pride
As if exhaustion were a trophy
As if withstanding stress is a mark of character
Even as we learn that stress is killing us

Yet, when I take time out
When I - schedule time away
When I - shut off all the distractions around me
I become more aware of just how driven I've become
The tyranny of my agenda - jumps out at me
I'm learning - thanks to this Lenten study focus
I'm learning - that I need restorative days
I need to lay down - this agenda
I need to lay down - my self-important projects
I need to lay down - MY will
So I can become more ready to do - HIS will

In the next few weeks I'll talk more about how to "Waste Time With God"
How to turn *Sabbath* into a verb - not just a noun

Matthew Sleeth, 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, & spiritual recovery
from the labors of our week.*"

The old stereotypical Sunday lunch with family –
or maybe dinner on the grounds at church
was a time to love & be loved,
to share & laugh,
to take a “mental health day.”

But when you hear the word “Sabbath” –
do you think of personal renewal for *total health* –
body, mind, soul, & relationships?

We think of Sunday 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, renewal, and reverence?

In this race of life – how do you get your second wind?

How can your weekly Stop Day become a “*Holy* Waste of Time?”

A HOLY WASTE OF TIME SERIES

Sermon 2) STOP THE WORLD (AND JUST GET OFF FOR A TIME)

Intro

A few years ago, our family went on vacation to the beach
Instead of planning out each day with activities and a schedule to keep,
we decided to make it a restful week
Upon arrival, my wife & I took off our watches and threw them into the suitcase
We got up when we felt like it,
ate meals when we got hungry,
checked the weather each morning to see if it was going to be
a beach day or a sight-seeing day
We spread puzzle pieces on a coffee table
and took our books out on the sand
We were so relaxed that at one time we had to turn on the TV Guide Channel
to check the date and see how many days of this we had left!
I can't remember a vacation that was so enjoyable and restful as that

"My soul finds rest in God alone." (Ps. 62:1)

1. Full throttle culture

"People in a hurry never have time for recovery. Their minds have little time to meditate and pray so that problems can be put in perspective. In short, people in our age are showing signs of physiological disintegration because we are living at a pace that is too fast for our bodies."

-Archibald Hart

Last week - I said - Living full throttle is expected in our culture -
sleep deprivation & running on empty are norms.
God's rhythms of rest & work - have gone missing -
Dr. Sleeth explains
We live in a nearly permanent state of exhaustion
& impending burnout.
Workaholism is just as detrimental to our health & relationships
as alcoholism & substance abuse

[The *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, p.64]

Our culture accepts that sleep deprivation and running on empty are norms. Living full throttle is expected. The ticking of the second hand defines our pace. And God's rhythms of rest and work give way to a nearly permanent state of exhaustion and impending burnout. You don't need to look far to see how

workaholism is compromising our health as well as our relationships. Lack of adequate rest can ruin our families, damage our souls, even kill us.

When we burn the candle at both ends we

- *Lose sight of what we enjoy in our work*
- *Find even the things we enjoy doing become a chore*
- *Fail to give people the gift of our attention and presence*
- *Impair our ability to hear God's voice and discern his movement in our lives*
- *Become obsessive about the to-do list*
- *Lose touch with the human limits that are meant to keep us in touch with God*

God created us in his image. He is a God who works and then rests. When we rest we honor the way God made us. Rest can be a spiritual act – a truly human act of submission to and dependence on God who watches over all things as we rest.

2. You gotta rest

When each of my children were infants,

I would spend Sunday afternoons napping with them.

As a church pastor, Sunday mornings were busy

We would come home from worship and eat lunch

Then I would cuddle a little one & settle onto the sofa or recliner

Often I would put my favorite team on TV and set an alarm for the 4th quarter

Then the baby & I would snore through the game for about 90 minutes

Oh, how I miss those days

now the kids stay awake,

making noise while I attempt to get my Sunday afternoon nap!

Spiritual Exercises

[*The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* p.65]

1. *Write down what a perfect day of rest and recreation would look like to you. Is it within the realm of possibility? Plan when you can take this day or a version of it. Schedule it on your calendar.*
2. *Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, then do something you delight in: go for a walk, take a nap, talk to a friend, have a cup of coffee, play a game. Enjoy yourself in God. Receive the gift of rest. Tell God what happens in you as you try to rest.*
3. *Consider whether or not your tiredness is about body or soul. What kind of rest would refresh your body: exercise, a nap, going to bed early? What kind of rest would refresh your soul: retreat, sleep, music, reading, centering prayer? Choose two times this week when you will intentionally enter into rest for body and soul.*

3. How do we DO Sabbath?

As a teenager, I had an opportunity to go on a personal vigil
In the dark of night I was led through the woods to a prepared site
I had just enough room to spread out a ground cloth and my sleeping bag
 beside a nicely laid fire ring
Handing me the candle that had lighted our way into the woods,
 my guide also left an "instruction manual" for the night
After getting my fire started, I turned my attention to the manual
 which turned out to be a copy of the Bible
All night long I was to keep my fire going -
 with nothing else to do but read life's instruction manual
What a blessing - to have nothing requiring my attention
 and hours to simply read & meditate on God's word

I've been visiting with our 24/6 Study Groups
 and a comment that keeps coming up -
 we know we need Sabbath,
 but we don't know how to do it

1st --- Make Preparations

In order to be successful at observing Sabbath - here are some things to do
- block out "Sabbath time" on your calendar
- make a list of activities you usually do on that day
 Separate "busy" from "holy" activities
 Schedule the busy activities for other days

--- I've been doing this to shift my own focus from
 having "A Day Off" to become "A Holy Sabbath"

2nd --- Plan your Sabbath Day

- BE a worshipER
- unhurried lunch meal - enjoy your company (and food)
- go for a stroll - not a power-walk
- phone call loved ones you don't see often (Skype or Face Time)

3rd --- Appreciate what this experience is like

- keeping company with Jesus
- reconnecting with people - not technology
- delighting in God, family, seasons, meals
- being rested physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.

4. Being

I recently read --- *Rest is a radical thing in our day & age.*

It reminds us that we are human beings, not human doings.

A couple of months ago I had the opportunity to co-lead
a 4-Day mostly Silent Retreat

I was with 16 people at a prayer center.

The only time we spent speaking

was during a 1-hour teaching session & small group discussion

A few words were spoken in the chapel during the “praying of the hours”

But otherwise, our time was spent listening to the Spirit

while walking the outdoor trails or the indoor labyrinth

We could read by the big fireplace or gaze upon ancient icons

We could create mandalas or even let our bodies rest in the bed

All of this was done in silence,

even our meals were conducted in “communal solitude”

Something happens in an environment like this

it’s best experienced just BEING with the Spirit of God

[*Spiritual Rhythms in Community*, p.89-90]

- *Sit by the river and simply watch the flow of the water and observe the animals that come and go.*
- *Play golf without keeping score or worrying about how you’re doing. Just play for fun and to be outdoors. ... not trying to improve your game or beat a previous best score. This may be tough, but notice why it is tough and let go of whatever gets in the way of just the delight of the sport.*
- *Take a long leisurely walk along a lake or in a forest and observe what goes on around you. Don’t take a notebook or camera, just be in that space with God or another. ... notice deeply what is in front of you, stopping at times to look intently at your surroundings and all it has for you to experience: sights, smells, sounds and textures. Use the eyes of ears of your heart.*
- *Sit in a park or public place and observe people. Watch their faces, their motion and activities. Make no judgment or attempt to understand or figure them out. Just be there.*
- *Take a young child to the zoo, a museum, or walk in nature – just follow their lead for at least half a day. You may need to give the child some options, but as much as possible let him or her dictate what you do and try to experience the day through the child’s curiosity, inclinations and meanderings. Do whatever he or she wants to do. Don’t lead; be led by the child. See the world through a child’s eyes. Go without an agenda, letting your child guide you into his or her experience.*

- Peter Kreeft

*"If you can't take time to do nothing, you're a slave to doing.
Doing nothing is a radical, revolutionary act.
It frees you from the universal slavery of our age:
slavery to the clock.
The clock measures doing but not being."*

We can get so busy doing urgent things
& so preoccupied with what comes next
that we don't experience **now**.
Afraid of being late - we rush from the past to the future.
The present moment becomes a crack between
what we did & what we have yet to do.
It is virtually lost to us.
We don't get to our futures any faster if we hurry.
And we certainly don't become better people in haste.
More likely than not, the faster we go the less we become.

Friends - Sabbath is about Stopping *your* World,
and getting off for just a little while
And when we do - I believe we'll discover the *real* world
that we've been missing all along

A HOLY WASTE OF TIME SERIES

Sermon 3) SHHH ... LEARNING HOW TO SHUT UP (IN ORDER TO FIND YOUR VOICE)

Intro

All these years later, I can still remember that week of summer Scout camp
when I earned my Environmental Merit Badge
Another scout and I would go out at various times of each day
to the same spot in the woods
We would sit still for a solid hour with just a notebook & pencil
writing down every observation we could make regarding the life around us
The kind of trees - and any moss or lichen on them
Crawling critters, buzzing bees, birds,
anything that we could see, smell, hear, or feel
Often, it was after 20 or 30 minutes of sitting still
when these life forms felt safe to emerge

[*Let Your Life Speak* - p.7-8]

The soul is like a wild animal – tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient, and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.

Today - I'm going to look at the four stages of learning how to shut up:

Show Up - Shut Up - Tune Up - Turn Up

I. Show Up

Today is - First Day of Spring

Keith Meyer - [*Spiritual Rhythms in Community*, p. 82]

The regreening of the brown decay makes me realize I am drinking in God's Easter-time re-clothing of the earth, his re-creating me and everything in his renewing love. Just as God renews his creation, God has re-created inner soul space for meeting him and others in my going to this holy place, this sacred space and time, to find him.

Jesus worked hard, long hours for days on end
but also practiced Sabbath - doing nothing at all
Jesus watched the birds & flowers
noticed people in ordinary life
His parables are full of these observations -
wasting time in God's creation

Jesus knew how to SHOW UP – to just be present with the Father

That's how he would reconnect with the Father's agenda

Remember when Jesus said –

I have come to do the will of the Father who sent me?

It was during Sabbath –

Jesus SHOWED UP – & discovered the Father's will

Sabbath allows us to disengage from the distractions of daily life

Keith Meyer wrote – [*Spiritual Rhythms in Community*, p. 21]

*These times and places of
practicing the presence of the Father
will eventually create a retreat center
of sacred space & time in our bodies.*

In the church – it's so easy to just keep people BUSY

but I'm thinking that we should teach people how to SHOW UP

to teach our people the *opposite* of constant distraction

Henri Nouwen – [*The Way of the Heart*, p.56]

In a society in which entertainment and distraction are such important preoccupations, ministers are also tempted to join the ranks of those who consider it their primary task to keep other people busy. ... But our task is the opposite of distraction. Our task is to help people concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God's active presence in their lives. Hence, the question that must guide all organizing activity in a parish is not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks in silence.

II. Shut Up

Just a few weeks ago – I co-led *The Big Silence Retreat* –

a 4-day, mostly silent retreat at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center

Aside from a few words spoken in chapel/worship services

and about 1.5 hours of teaching & small group discussion

We spent the better part of 4 days practicing what it's like to SHUT UP

When we speak = it is typically about the affairs of this world (our conversations)

But silence – like the silence we can have in our Sabbath time – reveals the HOLY

The Holy Spirit – is our FIRE within us

It's in silence, retreat, Sabbath –

our inner fire is tended & kept alive

Nouwen says - **[The Way of the Heart, p.47]**

Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers.

[Psalm 65, MSG]

¹⁻² Silence is praise to you,
Zion-dwelling God,
And also obedience.

You hear the prayer in it all.

²⁻⁸ We all arrive at your doorstep sooner
or later, loaded with guilt,

Our sins too much for us—

but you get rid of them once and for all.

Blessed are the chosen! Blessed the guest
at home in your place!

We expect our fill of good things
in your house, your heavenly manse.

All your salvation wonders
are on display in your trophy room.

Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,

Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,

Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash,
of mobs in noisy riot—

Far and wide they'll come to a stop,
they'll stare in awe, in wonder.

Dawn and dusk take turns
calling, "Come and worship."

⁹⁻¹³ Oh, visit the earth,
ask her to join the dance!

Deck her out in spring showers,
fill the God-River with living water.

Paint the wheat fields golden.

Creation was made for this!

Drench the plowed fields,
soak the dirt clods

With rainfall as harrow and rake
bring her to blossom and fruit.

Snow-crown the peaks with splendor,
scatter rose petals down your paths,

All through the wild meadows, rose petals.

Set the hills to dancing,

Dress the canyon walls with live sheep,
a drape of flax across the valleys.

Let them shout, and shout, and shout!

Oh, oh, let them sing!

III. Tune Up

Jesus saw others through God's eyes

He looked on the crowds – sheep without a shepherd,
with his Father's compassion.

Where did Jesus gain this sight?

During his time apart – Sabbath time with the Father

It was here that Jesus went for a **TUNE UP**

But our culture has distorted our understanding of solitude –
time alone

We think of time where we aren't bothered by others

Somewhere we can think our own thoughts,

wrestle with our fears & internal complaints

just doing our own thing

For many of us – solitude, silence, Sabbath – just means **PRIVACY**

Or maybe we think it's **JUST** a time to *recharge our batteries*

A way to regain strength to enter back into the fight of life

But Sabbath is more than a private therapeutic place.

When we **SHOW UP** with God & **SHUT UP** (mouths & minds)
Then the **TUNE UP** can happen

I think that “prayer closet” that Jesus tells us about
should function more like a mechanic’s garage – for the soul
It should be a place of deep conversion
where the old self dies – is removed by the Great Mechanic
& a new self is born

I think Jesus’ quiet prayer times with Father & Spirit
permeated his life & ministry with love.
I think Jesus needed long periods of time alone
to be formed by Divine love
& we do too

When we are filled with God’s love
It spills out of our hearts & lives
& splashes all over those around us
Even those that society considers unlovable

So – after we have **SHOWN UP**, **SHUT UP**, & been **TUNED UP**
We are now ready to **TURN UP**

IV. Turn Up

Keith Meyers says [*Spiritual Rhythms in Community*, p.32]

Jesus is our model of regularly disengaging from everyday life to be with his Father so he could engage life in the abiding presence of the Father, doing his will, listening to his voice and experiencing life in the Spirit that spills out onto others. I believe our experience of God’s love for us is in direct proportion to how much time we give to being with the Father through Jesus by the Spirit, both in solitude and in service to others.

It’s in the time we spend **DOING SABBATH**
The time we *Waste with the Lord*
The time that is *made Holy*
It’s in this time – that we are made ready
to be the hands & feet of Christ in our world

It’s March Madness right now
We will be surprised at some wins, & some losses
There will be games when one team just doesn’t **SHOW UP**
And other games when a player or whole team is “**IN THE ZONE**”

I still remember a game back in my Junior High days
when everything I threw at the goal went in – literally
Even when I was fouled hard in the lane and threw the ball toward the rim
hoping for 2 shots at the line,
somehow the ball found the basket while I was being knocked to the floor
That's the only time when I shot 100% for the entire first half
All the time spent showing up for practice
All the comments I kept to myself as the coach was speaking
All the attempts to better my skills
Paid off that day when I was able to fully TURN UP

Spiritually Speaking – Our *Holy Wasting Time* With God
prepares us to be “In the Zone” when the time comes
When Jesus is flowing through us so completely
That all we need to do – is be *available*
& God will do the rest

A HOLY WASTE OF TIME SERIES

Sermon 4) Sabbath-Keeping Is Not For Wimps

[Mark 4:35-41, Jesus calms the storm]

Prison Break

[*Sacred Time*, p.51-52] Jeff's Story

Jeff was a stellar student, an outstanding athlete, and a well-liked guy. He was class president, carried a 3.8 GPA, was enrolled in honors classes, and had received the citizen of the month award three times. In addition, he was the starting quarterback on the football team, started on the basketball team, and was an all-state third basemen. Oh yeah, did I mention he also had a paper route?

To say that his life was full of activity would be the understatement of the century. His day typically began at 4:30am so he could have all his papers delivered by 6am. School filled most of his day, and sports or school government issues filled time after school until about 7pm. Jeff then came home, showered, ate a late supper with the family, and then went to start on his homework. Since he was taking honors courses, it wasn't uncommon for him to have 2-3 hours of homework a night. This often meant he wasn't dropping into bed until about 11pm (or later) and giving to get back up at 4:30am to start the whole thing over again.

Jeff loves what he does, but lately he's been pondering something his pastor mentioned last Sunday. His pastor had preached about the idea of taking a Sabbath, a time devoted to spending time with God and reading His word, so that we would be refreshed and ready to tackle all of the things we have to do each week. The idea was intriguing to Jeff. After all, he couldn't really remember the last time he spent some quality time focused on God. However, Jeff looked at his calendar and couldn't figure out how he would do it. There simply wasn't any more time he could give. "Oh well," Jeff thought. "Maybe my life will get a little less insane after basketball season is over and I can think about it then."

Jesus' Example

Jesus was a busy man – but he gave us a great example of Sabbath
Why was he in that boat with the disciples?

To get away for much needed rest

Why was he being pursued by others like paparazzi?

They wanted ALL of him, ALL the time

But Jesus knew better

Jesus knew to *disengage* from everyday life – & be with the Father

So that – he could *engage* life in the Spirit

In times alone – Jesus was being formed – by Father & Spirit

Often described as the “dance of the Trinity”

The more time we spend
with the Father, through Jesus, by the Spirit
the more we will experience God's love
Like I said last week - we've just got to *Show Up*

Pilgrimage

Yet - how many of us can relate to Jeff's Story?
For many of us it starts early in life -
the patterns are put into place
our habits of overwork calcify
When this season is over, I'll have more time
When college is over, I'll have more time
When this contract is finalized ...
When the kids move out on their own ...
When I retire ...
But every step of the way - those habits are reinforced
And the more difficult it is to start new, healthier habits

Sabbath-Keeping is not for Wimps!
Wimps don't have the will to fix what's broken
Wimps just go on feeling stressed, overwhelmed, exhausted
It takes strength to free ourselves from
the addiction of the electronic virtual world
to enter the real presence of God & others.
To live in the moment
To enter into silence - with God
Deep enough to *listen*
Down where the calm happens
In the refuge from the storms
that are whipping up the surface waters
where we so often find ourselves

Discipline & Courage

But this doesn't happen all of a sudden - it's a process, a pilgrimage
We Methodists call it - the process of *Sanctification*
being made into Christlikeness
The truth is - breaking out of our prison of productivity - takes courage

For Church people - programmed services, youth programs,
committees, classes, small groups
For consumers - Sunday is for shopping
For working people - it's time to run errands & catch up chores
For athletes & family - travel, chairs, & water bottles

How do we DO SABBATH - in today's culture?

How messy is it gonna be - if we take Sabbath seriously?

Ruth Haley Barton - in *Sacred Rhythms* says

[p.133 - 135]

I also didn't want to wrestle with the issues that I knew sabbath would raise in my life. At that point, Sunday was anything but a day of rest in our family. Let's face it: for church people it is a day for highly programmed services, youth programs, committee meetings, membership classes and small groups that wear everyone out and keep family members coming and going all day. For consumers, Sunday is a day to shop. For working people, it is a time to catch up and do all the errands and household chores that are missed during the week. For athletes and their families, it is a day for packing chairs, bags and water bottles and traveling far and wide to sporting events. I just did not know how to try to incorporate this radical discipline into my life in the midst of a culture that knows nothing of setting aside a whole day to rest and delight in God. What a messy can of worms this was going to open up!

The truth is, Sabbath keeping is a discipline that will mess with you, because once you move beyond just thinking about it and actually begin to practice it, the goodness of it will capture you, body, soul and spirit. You will long to wake up to a day that stretches out in front of you with nothing in it but rest and delight. You will long for a simple way to turn your heart toward God in worship without much effort. You will long for a space in time when the pace is slow and family and friends linger with one another, savoring one another's presence because no one has anywhere else to go.

Sabbath keeping is more than just taking a day of rest; it is a way of ordering one's life around a pattern of working six days and then resting on the seventh. It is a way of arranging our life to honor the rhythm of things - work and rest, fruitfulness and dormancy, giving and receiving, being and doing, activism and surrender. The day itself is set apart, devoted completely to rest, worship and delighting in God, but the rest of the week must be lived in such a way as to make Sabbath possible. Paid work needs to be contained to five days of the week. Household chores, shopping and errand-running need to be complete before the Sabbath comes, or they must wait. Courageous decisions need to be made about work and athletics, church and community involvement.

[Study Group's Progression]

During this Lenten Season,

I've witnessed a progression among our study group participants:

- 1) Discovery (or rediscovery) of the Sabbath purpose
- 2) Realization of what we are missing when we don't Sabbath
- 3) A yearning to receive the blessings that Sabbath offers
- 4) An uncertainty that they can achieve this in today's world

5) Attempts at “test-driving” Sabbath-time
Those who make it – those who will get to experience Sabbath
are the Strong & Courageous,
those unafraid of life-giving discipline.
Why are You Afraid? Do you still have no faith?
Hobby Lobby founder & CEO – David Green

Refuge & Life to Others

Keith Meyer [*Spiritual Rhythms in Community*, p.40]

*Our lives are either places of refuge & life for others
or dead ends of more stress & drivenness.*

Only when we disengage

Only when we break out of the world’s mold,

Do we become a refuge for others.

That’s what Jesus was in the boat that day.

For those fearful disciples – Jesus calmed their anxiety

Jesus put thing aright again

Conversely – when we live constantly on the surface of life

in an endless stream of busyness

we become stressors – toward ourselves, & also toward others

It takes courage – to retreat into sacred space & time

to be *formed* by the holy

instead of being *deformed* by our non-stop world

We have to move beyond attempts at relaxing

that are only catching our breath

and discover how to breathe deeply – of the Spirit of God

Conclusion

I want you to go home today

Mark your calendar – on every Sabbath

Make a list – 2 columns: busyness & holy

Say “No” to the things in the *busyness* column

Say “Yes” to the items in the *holy* column

Let the storm rage on – Like Jesus in the boat

And when possible

calm the storm for those around you

Sabbath-Keeping is for the strong – & it only makes us stronger.