

Today we heard the 10 commandments. These are just the first 10. There are a total of 613 commandments for observant Jews. Of those 613, there are 33 commandments for various Sabbath times. As you might expect, there are more commandments relating to God himself. And you may be fascinated to know that there are a measly 3 for murder, 2 for adultery, 6 for stealing and coveting, and about 6 for lying. Compared to these, Sabbath has a lot of commandments.

There's a lot to say about Sabbath, but today we're looking at Sabbath rest. I see rest as part of a continuum. Once we are rested, we can begin to be refreshed. And once we are refreshed, we can find ourselves renewed. These are all part of the continuum of Sabbath rest.

There are two main ways of looking at the idea of rest. First, rest can be the refraining from work. Second, rest can be doing something other than work. Let's start by looking at the concept of refraining from work.

The Sabbath was a deeply radical idea in the ancient world. No one else had a day off of work every week unless they were wealthy or high class, which weren't that many people. An entire society with a day of rest all at the same time? That was outrageous. Even women and children and slaves and animals resting? That was REALLY outrageous.

Even today, it's a radical notion. We resist Sabbath and we resist rest in our culture. And I'm afraid the women in our culture are the worst about this. Ladies, listen up. Imagine an entire day every week for your entire life, where you don't have to cook or clean or plan things or do a mountain of emotional labor. An entire day where you can nap or read or lay around with your loved ones just like they do. It sounds like paradise, doesn't it? It sounds almost too decadent. Just imagining it may make us feel a little guilty. Right? But God's Sabbath rest is for everyone.

Sabbath is for the poorest wage-slave. It's for students, those who are out of work, and those experiencing homelessness. Sabbath is for retirees. Sabbath is for those who think they can't or shouldn't rest.

There's a story I heard about a professional athlete. He had a business meeting every day at two o'clock. One day a friend of his came to his house and found him sleeping at that time. The athlete explained that he performed much better with a daily nap. He knew that neither he nor his naps would ever be respected, so he called his naps business meetings. Everyone respected his meetings.

Why should we go against the grain of our culture and rest? Because even a car or a washing machine or a computer can't run all the time, and they're built for running. Human beings don't do very well without rest or sleep. When we sleep, there's a lot that goes on. More than just repair to our bodies. A lot happens to our minds and emotions too during sleep. In the same way, more than just our bodies are refreshed and renewed when we rest a full day once a week for a long period of time. Our relationships improve. Our lives become more full and complete. We find fulfillment and complexity for our whole beings.

A lot of the ancient rules for keeping the Sabbath include a lot of things about not working. Ancient Jews are not supposed to do anything related to agriculture, tending to animals beyond what's absolutely necessary, or any domestic tasks. There are 39 things you can't do, and they all have modern equivalents for observant Jews today.

What about us? I suggest we don't worry about a bunch of rules. Here's something you can use to decide what Sabbath might look like for you. If you can start a sentence with "I get to..." then you're probably safe to do that thing on the Sabbath. But if you start a sentence with "I should..." or "I need to..." then I'd recommend avoiding that thing on the Sabbath, unless it's a basic bodily need.

There's more to Sabbath than just not working, but even not working would make a huge difference in our lives. Sabbath rest is not about just sitting around and watching the paint dry. And here we can talk about the other part of rest. We can talk about doing something different.

Do you remember the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*? The main character is Tevye, and early in the musical he sings the song, *If I Were a Rich Man*. The song talks about all the things he would have if he were rich: a house and property and good things for his family... and he talks about how others would see and admire all these things. But then he sings this:

*If I were rich, I'd have the time that I lack, to sit in the synagogue and pray. And maybe have a seat by the Eastern wall. And I'd discuss the holy books with the learned men, seven hours every day. That would be the sweetest thing of all.*

Teveye knows what all those who are steeped in the Sabbath know. Enjoying the fruits of God's goodness from rest to refreshment to renewal brings us from the healing of our whole selves to the healing of our relationships with each other and, ultimately, to the healing and renewal of our relationship with God.

Always, always, this is the direction of Sabbath. Our practice of Sabbath rest may not originally start as a search for God and our relationship with him, but if we do Sabbath in the right spirit, it will always end up there. It is how we are made. It is how we are created by God.

It's a tall order, coming into a right relationship with God. It's a daunting task. So it's best not to worry about it too much. Let's not work too hard at Sabbath rest.

Really. Relax. We won't accomplish it by trying hard. That's one of the slightly humorous mysteries about spiritual growth. Yes, we need to have an aim and a commitment, but then we need to forget about trying so very hard. We need to relax and be led by divine hands. When we do, by some miracle we find ourselves in deeper relationship with the divine.

So, relax. Rest. Enjoy. Read that book you've been meaning to read. Have faith that it will lead you to scripture later on. Write in the journal you've been meaning to write in. Have faith that it will lead to prayer and insight later on. Take a nap with your beloved. Have faith that it will someday lead to holy intimacy. Talk with your youngest loved ones. Have faith that it will someday lead to conversations of deep holiness that will live in their memories long after you've gone. Have faith that these things will happen. Have faith that these things will happen for us here at Grace.

Today, when you get home, I want you to look around begin the sentence, "I get to..." and try finishing the phrase. I think most of us will tack on a second sentence that starts, "but first I need to..."

That's okay. Sabbath takes preparation and practice. When I go home today, I will probably say, "I get to... take a nap." And since I've practiced Sabbath for some time, I will then say, "Thanks be to God."

As we at Grace learn deeply about Sabbath, we we learn how to prepare and as we practice Sabbath, I pray that all of our "I get to..." sentences will be followed by, "Thanks be to God."

Amen.