

# ***Sabbath: A Rhythm Of Receptivity***

**Genesis 1:26 - 2:8**

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2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;  
3 he restores my soul....

<play video clip on Psalm 23:5>

NLT Psalm 23:1 The LORD...my shepherd...  
leads me beside peaceful streams....  
renews my strength...

Can you feel that?  
Would you say that this is what your life is like?

Or - does it resemble Lake Superior after a mid-November gale?

A quiet stream?  
Or a raging river?

Is your life fresh, and being refreshed?  
Or do you feel it draining away? Empty and dry?  
Or maybe deluged and drowning?

Then, may I welcome you to God's gift of Sabbath.

In this sometimes crazy, more often than not draining, and not very still world God gives us a regular life space to rest, to be refreshed, to receive His renewal for our often tired and emptied and challenged hearts and souls and minds and bodies.

Sabbath.

We've been spending time during this season of Lent to think about Sabbath.

In our first week we thought about Jesus, whom the Bible presents to us as Sabbath in the flesh, Sabbath Incarnate. About how a relationship with Him is the only true beginning to find peace and rest for our inner selves.

Last week we talked about God's gift of Sabbath rest - about His design for Creation to have built-in, regular space and time where we STOP our regular work, put aside our TO-DO lists, and renew our relationships with the Creator and with His Creation;  
time to pray and time to play.  
time for worship and time for fellowship.

We're going to build on that this week as we speak of Sabbath as God's space for **receptivity** in our lives; space to **receive** the Lord's Psalm 23-like loving and nourishing presence into our often challenged lives.

Sabbath - a weekly time for **receiving**.

Consider Genesis 1:26-2:3. Notice, please, that Adam was the last created being. How? Out of the dust of the ground, yes, and then...  
...then....  
....did you catch what comes next?

God **breathes** into Adam the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

Adam **receives** the gift of breath, the gift of life from the mouth of God.

Don Postema, in his wonderful little book on Sabbath, *Catch Your Breath*, whose contents form the structure for this sermon series, points something out that I've never noticed -

Adam was the last act of Creation. End of day six.  
He sleeps and wakes up to the first full new day of his life.  
And.....

What is that first full new day of his life?

It was the day of God's rest, Sabbath Day.

Adam wasn't born, waking up to a life of "to-do's".

His first day wasn't a day of assignments and expectations.

It was a day of Sabbath enjoyment - enjoying His Creator, and exploring the Creation. Before accomplishing anything Adam shares this day of refreshment with God.

The Sabbath Day of being..... not doing.

That's what was given to Adam.

That's how his existence began.

It's what he **received**.

A gracious gift from a gracious Giver.  
breathed into him.

Go ahead - as you are sitting there, may I invite you to quietly breath in?

Do it consciously.

Notice the air streaming into your lungs.

It brings you life.

Imagine God blowing in, as it was with Adam.

You know, we still **receive** life as pure gift from God.

And we **receive** new life as pure gift through the Saviour.

And we **receive** the inspiration and strength to live that new life through the encouragement and power of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit of the Saviour.

It is what we accept as Christians.

It is right at the core of our faith.

Triune God is the **Giver**.

We are **Receivers**.

receiving what we didn't first earn.

That is the heart and core of our faith -

*grace, not achievement*

*pardon, not guilt*

*forgiveness, not confession*

*justification, not faith*

*freedom, not fear,*

*God's original love, not our original sin.*

*Receiving..... not giving. [Postema, p.52]*

And this is often what makes Sabbath such a hard experience for so many people. Because we want to earn what we get. We want to feel that somehow we deserve it. In one way or another we want to pay for it.

But the Christian faith tells us to quit trying so hard;

to just hold our hands open to God's gift of relationship and love.

to **receive** it.

So, here in this space on Merivale Rd that is dedicated to Sabbath.....

Go ahead.

Take a breath.

Receive the gift of air and life.

Take it in.....

And know that even more than this air pouring into your lungs

God's love is pouring

- right now -

into your soul.

Any work that was needed for that pouring love is all done!  
Done for you by Jesus!  
In this season of Lent, as you see the cross here at the front,  
remember that.

Jesus did the work.  
His work is complete and sufficient.  
No need to try and add anything to it.  
Just **receive** it!

Sabbath is the time in your life to be reminded of that - each week again.  
Don't think of Sabbath so much as a *do-nothing* day.  
May I invite you to, instead, think of it as a day to **Receive**.  
As Postema points out, to receive is not to do nothing.  
We are active as we receive. We are involved in it.  
We pay attention when we receive a gift.  
We acknowledge that gift.  
We affirm the gift.  
We thank the Giver.  
We enjoy the good gift.

And so, we can actively receive on the Sabbath -  
The gift of life.  
The gift of salvation.  
The gift of a believing community.  
The gift of opportunities and resources.  
Yes, on Sabbath we are aware and thankful for these.

Sabbath - the **receiving** day.  
Oh, how we need it! The rest of the week is often so full. Cluttered even.  
It's often noisy.  
Sometimes complicated.  
Sabbath gives us structured time to untangle our lives, to slow down, to simplify, to become quiet.

Remember the opening words of our service from Psalm 46?  
*Be silent, and know that I am God!*  
That's the Sabbath call.  
Which we answer. And it is then, hushed and aware, that we can again notice.  
And noticing we become **receptive**.  
We are brought to the essence of life and life nourishment.

Sometimes people tell me, "*Pastor, I don't need to come to church to experience my Sabbath. I can do it at home.*"

Fair enough.  
It is very legitimate to become aware of and receive God's presence in nature, for example. Aware of His greatness next to a giant white pine. Aware of His tender care in the flitting of a humming bird. As one of our church's confessional statement says -  
*the universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book  
in which all creatures, great and small,  
are as letters to make us ponder  
the invisible things of God:  
his eternal power  
and his divinity... [article 2]*

So, I affirm Sabbath time spent on a nature trail or in a garden.

And yet, it's hard to beat this worship space as a central part of Sabbath experience. To slow down your life long enough to come to a place and event that deliberately focuses you on heaven, that isn't filled with

all the stimulation of the rest of the week, to experience structured quiet and simple actions of prayer and reading and meditation -

while we make no claims for it to be perfect

it sure beats a lot of alternatives in getting us deliberately calmed down and into a zone where we can be receptive to God.

And where we can then carry that receptivity into the rest of our lives -

receptivity to God's Word

receptivity to God's voice

receptivity to God's presence

receptivity to God's work.

Sabbath receptivity.

It can come as we enter this place and wait for the service to begin.

We look around and **notice...**

The art work, the cross of Christ.

Maybe notice the quiet.

Or notice the music of the prelude.

Or notice some of the other believers who also come.

It maybe something in a song that makes us notice.

Or in one of the prayers.

Or in the bible reading or sermon.

Or when we hold the bread and cup of Holy Communion.

Know what else we may notice?

Maybe sitting there we will notice, for the first time in days,

some of the feeling bottled up inside of us,

some of the emotions

some of the hurts and questions we've been carrying around all week.

I can't count anymore how often people tell me that when they come into this place the tears begin to flow.

*"Why?" they want to know.*

*Why here and why now? It seems so weird.*

Have you experienced that?

Well, at least part of the answer is that here's maybe the first time and perhaps the only place that we allow our souls to become exposed. Here may be the first time and place in a long while - maybe days or weeks or months - where all the garbage and noise of our daily routine gets pushed away long enough that we can connect with the deep corners of our heart and mind.

And when those corners are in pain, the tears will come.

Which is OK, believer.

This is as safe a place as you'll get for those tears to flow.

I invite you to see in your imagination the angels of God collecting those precious tears up, and bringing them to the Lord.

And then this worship space becomes the Sabbath place where we wait for the Lord in a receptive state described in Psalm 130 –

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.*

*O Lord, hear my voice....*

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits...*

*more than watchmen wait for the morning....*

So, yes, in bright and good and happy chapters of our lives, Sabbath is the time to get into a receptive state where we can again become aware of the God from whom all blessings flow.

And give thanks.

And gain renewed appreciation for the gifts.

**BUT ALSO -**

In the darker night-time chapters, in the times when it feels like we are swimming upstream against a raging river of pain, Sabbath allows us to receive a bit of hope and to let go of some of the frustration and struggle. To receive a bit of release from the Lord -

Letting someone else offer a word of prayer, and receiving it.

Either here in the sanctuary as the pastor prays.

Or in the prayer room, quietly, one on one.

Receiving a bit of courage from a song or the bible.

Or just in the being here as the Spirit quietly does something we can't even really describe in rebuilding the deep places of our lives.

A little bit at a time.

Yup, part of Sabbath space here at Calvin is opening our aching hearts and storm splattered lives to the Good Shepherd who promises to renew and nourish us.

It is the space to acknowledge the very real struggles.

But **also** the even more real power of God to come along side of us during the stormy chapters and - mysteriously, somehow - to get us through.

Receptive.

Waiting for the Lord.

And so, in joy

**AND**

in struggle

Hands and hearts open to the Lord.

That's Sabbath.

God's life-saving, life-restoring gift to us.

<play video clip on Psalm 23:5>

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