

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

June 2, 2024



SABBATH

we are more than our work

by Drew Downs

The writer Malcolm Gladwell described the secret rule for mastery: ten thousand hours. It fit a narrative of the moment about the need for hard work, determination, and grit.

The Protestant Work Ethic, a foundational part of puritan life in North America, has long championed work itself as virtuous—and the source of God’s blessing and fortune. And rest (and other acts of idleness) is therefore sinful and deplorable.

What these ideas (and their many variants, like today’s grind culture) offer is an orientation away from rest. Something God not only commands the people have, but orders the world around it. God doesn’t order the world around work, but around rest!

When the pressure is off, we are able to live. We are freed from shackles of anxiety and offered a way of new, vibrant living. In short, only in Sabbath may the real us emerge.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Sabbath Season

When we learn about Sabbath, most of us are taught that it is one day out of the week. We learn about the restrictions and the motivations; perhaps mostly that we keep it as one of the Ten Commandments.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Sabbath is offered as something far more than a day of the week: it is a pattern. Sabbath is a day and a practice and an ordering of existence. It is also a year and a collection of years. The seventh day, the seventh year, and the seventh of a seven year cycle is a Jubilee.

The pattern serves to remind us that we are too overwhelmed with work, control, and power. That we exploit ourselves, our people, our neighbors—and more!—our slaves, livestock, fields. We can add to that our children, our land, our communities, our food, our resources, our very planet.

And the pattern isn't just to rest, either. It is to free one another from work *and* commerce. Farmers are to give food away so we can all eat. They have control over a resource we all need, so the Sabbath reminds us not to starve people for profit.

Summer in the Midwest functions as a partial Sabbath Season. Many of us take time away, some travel, and some simply enjoy how the weather offers a change of routine. Even a freedom from having to go to a gym. Imagine if we went all the way! And embraced the true nature of the Sabbath pattern. We might reflect the freeing, loving, relaxing nature of God—an offering of restoration for all.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 4B

June 2, 2024

Collect

O God, your never-failing providence sets in order all things both in heaven and earth: Put away from us, we entreat you, all hurtful things, and give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 2:23-3:6

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

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

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus has his critics. People who don't understand what he is doing. And because he is playing with expectations, such as forgiving sins, eating with tax collectors, and not encouraging his disciples fast, those critics worry about what Jesus is teaching his followers.

Jesus is messing with the order of things. With tradition. And for most people, this is a welcome development! But for some...it is deeply threatening. And then, when the rule is about doing things on the Sabbath? Well, that's too far.

I suspect our reading of this is colored by our own sanguinity around the reservation of holy days and the preservation of tradition. And given our cultural rejection of the spirit at the heart of Sabbath—to *not* out-hustle your neighbor—it should be fair to say that we don't really get the scale of what's happening.

We do get that Jesus is comparing himself to King David and saying he gets to be the exception to the rule. And then we also get that Jesus sees healing a man's withered hand is a lifesaving intervention—and that lifesaving interventions are actually super Sabbath.

At the root of Sabbath is God's command for how we are to order ourselves. Not just for work and for rest, but how *all* are given *freedom* through rest. Vacation isn't just for the wealthy. But Sabbath isn't just about occasional times of rest, either, but a relationship to work that puts it below God's desires for the world. Below our own self-interests. It is a rejection of our societal hierarchies, working ourselves to death, anxiety over economic conditions, or any number of ways we bully one another for cultural supremacy.

Sabbath is for saving lives. Which includes our neighbors.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
