

“Stop & Rest”

Matthew 11:27-30

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost; October 4, 2020

Today let’s delve a bit into our imaginations. Imagine for a moment that you are in your favorite place — that place where you feel most relaxed, calm, refreshed, and happy. Can everyone think of a place like that?

Is it by a lake? In a garden? In the woods? In the mountains?

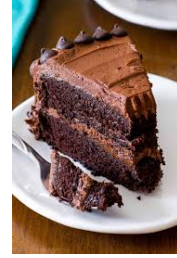


Maybe for you it’s a real place, or maybe it’s an imaginary place. Take time and imagine that place right now.

What are some of those places for you? Okay, now close your eyes, and go to that place. How do you feel? Do you feel more relaxed? More at ease? You just experienced what might be called a psychological “rest stop.”

A rest stop is a brief reprieve from the stresses and rough roads of life. It’s a time of relaxation, refreshment and joy in which for a brief

moment, you can put your troubles aside, and breathe. For some of us, that might mean a piece of chocolate cake... a glimpse of heaven.



We all need something that breaks our stress, interrupts our pain with a little bit of pleasure and joy — something that breaks our “fasting” with some peace. We all need a “selah” as noted in the book of Psalms — a peace pause, a “rest stop.” In a way, it’s sort of like a “rest stop” on the road. It’s a “time out.” Break time. Relief time, even if just a little while.

How many know what we’re talking about? You understand, it’s when you go traveling and you’re going by car, driving for hours and you really need a pit stop. Maybe it’s a potty break you need, or a fresh bottle of water, or a snack, or a brief nap. Maybe you just need to stretch your legs because you have been cramped-up in a bucket seat for a really long time. Or worse, maybe you’re almost out of gas! How many have experienced that before? That feeling of exasperation and panic, worry and anxiety, when the gas gauge is suddenly all the way down to empty, and you’re scraping along just “knowing” you could

end-up by the side-of-the-road out of gas in a strange place in the middle



of nowhere with no filling station in sight for miles. It's then that you see the sign by the road that reads: "Rest Stop: One Mile." You heave a

sigh of relief. Made it!

You're exhausted. You're tired. You're parched. Your stomach is making grumbly sounds. You can just feel those hunger pangs gnawing at your peace of mind. When that rest stop comes, you climb out, get some refreshing water, get some kind of food in your belly, and stretch those aching limbs. It's almost a feeling of heaven. That's the kind of feeling of satiation and simple joy that comes with getting a needed "rest."

And you — oh boy! — needed it! It's hard to keep your eyes on the road when you're weary from traveling. It can feel long, tedious, and can tear away at your nerves, especially if you're in bumper-to bumper traffic or a stressful 5-lane highway. Rest stops were created for this kind of necessary break.

Has your week been long? Has the road been hard? Life been tough? Take a break. Pull over. Relax. Refresh. Stop and rest.

In the Jewish tradition, it's called "sabbath," named by God — who after 6 hard days of labor in creating the entire universe — decided to take a little rest. But that word "rest" is a tricky sort of word. We



have misconstrued that word in our today's culture with the idea that taking a "rest" means taking time for ourselves just to do more stuff, to get that delayed home project up and moving. Or sleeping-in instead of going to church. Oh, you bet there are times when I would love to do that — because the Culver herd is often on overdrive too! Here's the problem though: that's not the kind of "rest" that God intended with God's idea of the sabbath. Sabbath isn't a break FROM God. Sabbath is a break WITH God!

Many of you know what I mean. Imagine you're married or you have a close companion and you work hard all week and barely see each other. Then you get to the weekend, and all you want to do is enjoy

each other's company, have actual conversations, revel in relaxation together. It's all about the relationship.

Shabbat is a "rest of the heart." The word is used hundreds of times in the scriptures to signify the "peace" of God. You observe sabbath "to" or "with" God. It's during this time when God "releases" us from our heavy load or burden. From our days of toil and trouble, we're given rest, reprieve, renewal, refreshment. In other words, sabbath is time to take a breath. But not just any breath: a deep breath from our master rejuvenator, the Holy Spirit.

This is why Jesus tells us, "Are you having a real struggle? Come to me! Are you carrying a big load on your back? Come to me – I'll give you a rest!" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is our Sabbath. Jesus IS our break. Sabbath is a time when we allow the Lord to refresh us, heal us, renew us, and rejuvenate us before sending us out again into the mission field. We get prepared to follow him into long and sometimes difficult places filled with hurting and agnostic people.

Jesus the Messiah is our resting place — not yet our "final resting place" while we are functioning on this earth, although someday he will

be. But in this time and place, Jesus is our rest — our “relationship of peace and joy” in which we commune with God while here on this earth. This communing with God gives us a “taste” or “foretaste” as our communion liturgy tells us, of God’s heavenly kingdom.

Jesus the Messiah is our breath — and so sabbath with Jesus is a little bit of heaven. That adds a good amount of significance to Holy Communion, wouldn’t you say?

Sabbath isn’t vacation time away from the Lord. Sabbath is a “take a breath time.” It’s a given opportunity to remember that every breath that filters through our lungs is a gift of life from God.

For you and me on the disciple-road with Jesus, the journey can sometimes feel endless and hard. You know that’s why we have worship, right? Worship is our rest stop on the way — whether up the peaks or down through the valleys towards our destination of kingdom glory. Traveling hither and yon through the mission field can be tiring, but worship is our refreshment stop. We sing (okay, probably not today but someday), we praise, we pray, we smile, we celebrate Holy Communion, and we release all the anxieties and irritations we’ve been holding in our

bodies during the past week. We stretch our minds and hearts, breathe-in deeply, and allow ourselves a good, deep God-kind of “rest.”

Sabbath “worship and praise” are what give our souls the juice needed for the next leg of the journey. Most of all, worship and praise



are what keeps our faith fresh from week to week so that we can start our engines and merge on to that discipleship road again. God’s rest doesn’t mean

you completely go off of the grid. You have a journey and you know you will get there. There’s a light on that’s waiting for you. Don’t give up on your course or your passion for the road. You’re going somewhere. There’s a destination — and it’s called “home.” But now you pull over for a moment. You take this time to refresh your spirit and get nourishment before you journey on.

There’s no one more nourishing to a tired spirit than King Jesus. Worship is your rest stop on the way to eternity. Sabbath is a time to revel in your relationships, especially your relationship with the one,

true God. Sabbath is an opportunity for you to renew your strength. To eat and fuel-up. To get ready for a fresh start.

Our faith ancestors were nomadic. They were nearly always traveling. A “rest stop” (an oasis) for them was a great relief — a time-out from being on some journey. Sometimes they lingered a while. They pitched tents. They built altars to worship God as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did throughout those hills. Sabbath was time to be together with God. And during this time, their hearts were at rest. They were at peace. For a little while at least, the camp became a place for a new beginning. Covenant after covenant began with God giving his people a new start. And perhaps the greatest of these stories is the story of Noah. You can be sure that these folks talked about Noah around the campfire.

The word “noah” in Hebrew is “noach.” “Noach” means a place



of rest, a resting place, a place to start anew, a renewed covenant — if you will. Noah’s name is a play on words, for when Noah’s ark reaches Mount

Ararat and the waters recede from the lands, the Lord God gives Noah, a

new “resting place” — a place of rest from the turbulent waters, the transitional travel, and the long, hard days of turmoil. It’s a new start, a new covenant in a new place, to begin a new world for God’s people.

This is what we do every time we come into worship with God our creator, renewer, and Lord. In worship, our hearts are given a new resting place, peace from worry, relief from sin, a refreshing from the travel, a brand new start, a ready beginning in our faith and in our lives.

Sabbath isn’t a time to “check-out” of worship. It’s our need to “check-into” worship. This is where the refreshments are served. This where the living water fountain flows. This is



where we take, eat, the bread and cup of Holy Communion. This is where we are rejuvenated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Worship is where we gear up again for the road and the way and the journey yet to come.

If you don’t refresh, you will burn out. You will blow your engine. Those who say have burned-out on life and living may have not stopped

for that soul-thirsty refreshment at the “watering hole” we the church call worship.



Holy Communion today is — among many other things — a reminder that without Jesus’s living Self indwelling within us and priming our gears to go his way, to strengthen for the journey, things will be more difficult than they have to be. The choice is ours. Honor this time, because if you don’t, you could find yourself running out of gasoline. And the road can get awfully dark when your destination is still off in the distance. Worship is your resting place, and faith is your fuel.

Let’s take time now (from a safe social-distance) and breathe that Holy Spirit breath. Fill up your tank with the bread and body of Christ, the juice and blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit of Christ. And may you find that as you do, you will merge out into the world renewed, with a fresh sense of mission and a renewed joy for service, ready to assist weary travelers broken down by the side of the road.

Come to worship. Come to Jesus. Amen.