

“Resting”

Troy Bronsink wrote in his book, **DRAWN IN A Creative Process for Artists, Activists, and Jesus Followers**, that the “**first Sabbath was not God’s retirement. God only ceased from work for that part of the creative process, and would then reenter the grand creative project.**” “For storytelling purposes, the epoch of beginning may have come to a narrative peak, but many more beginnings would follow. The creative work of God would continue, and still continues.” “**And so, the creation of rest is a key component of the process.**” Bronsink continued, “As my friend Wayne Muller has written, ‘If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop — because our work is never completely done. With every accomplishment there arises a new responsibility. . .’”

One way God encouraged us to “rest”, as part of the creative process we have been given for our calling to be co-creators with our Creator is found in our Scripture from Exodus. The Ten Commandments given to Moses included in **verses 8-10a**, “**Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to Me. On that day no one is to work**”. God was reported to have explained the reason for the commandment in **verse 11**, “**In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.**”

Bronsink argued his reasons for seeing the need to “rest”, writing, “**Today, church can keep us from dreaming. Church — when devoid of love, hovering, listening, risking, integration, or rest — can lose its creative edge as well.**” “Jesus would recognize that his contemporaries were getting worn-out on the artificial rhythms of religion. He could see it in their eyes, and in the eyes of John’s disciples, and the Pharisees. And in response he invited them into ‘the unforced rhythms of grace’ (Matthew 11: 29 MSG).”

Since Bronsink referred to The Message translation of Matthew 11:29, I thought I might share that verse in context. **Verses 27-30** have Jesus state, “**Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. ‘The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.’**”

“**Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.**”

Bronsink explained, “**Grace is an interesting word for Sabbath rest. Grace frees us for all of these lost arts. Grace is the matrix, the canvas of creativity from Creation forward.**” “Sabbath is the space where you open yourself to the pull of grace, the magnetic pull forward into the Imagineer’s promised future. Like an artist designing her studio to accentuate deeper creative engagement, God quarters off a temporal place for creation to lean into grace. Grace and Sabbath are not places to brainstorm and plan for the next day, they are the opportunity to be here now, to taste and see that the Lord is good in this moment. Grace is that space where we look at one another and rediscover the words of Jesus, ‘The kingdom of God is in your midst’ (Luke 17: 21 NIV). Or as one scholar translates Jesus’ words,” “**Unless a person submits to this original creation — the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life — it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom (John 3:5 MSG).**”

During Jesus’ Public Ministry the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and the Priests were big proponents of the Sabbath Commandment. However, their view of that commandment is not what we are talking about, as we consider the ongoing process of creativity and our need to incorporate “Rest” into the rhythm of our lives. By the way, the Jewish Sabbath is sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Jesus had a much different understanding of the purpose of the Sabbath and Rest from that of the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and the Priests. Jesus’ views are significantly revealed in **Mark 2:27-28**, “**And Jesus concluded, ‘The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’**” For the Pharisees and the Priests, the Sabbath laws demanded radical obedience of the population. The Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees benefited from that by being the authorities, who defined how everyone was to behave on the Sabbath. The Priests had a vested interest in the people supporting the Worship Institutions, especially on the Sabbath. **In the Scripture quote, Jesus made it clear that God’s Purpose for the Sabbath Rest was and is to benefit human beings – not some commandment or its interpreters or benefactors.** He also declared himself to be the Lord or Master of the Sabbath because he was revealing the Truth about the Sabbath Rest.

Bronsink wrote, “Something grossly overlooked in the creative process is the place of effortlessness, the place of play and imagination.”

“What we do know is that God’s lost art of creativity is a rhythm, and that this rhythm includes stopping, setting down the brush, the drumsticks, the pen, the shovel, closing the laptop, finishing the sermon, and turning off the iPhone. Dreams come during silence, play, and rest.”

Clarifying God’s Purpose for the Sabbath Rest, Jesus asked in **Mark 3:4, 5b-6**, **“What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save someone’s life or to destroy it?”** I suspect the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and the Priest were not willing to answer those questions. So, **“Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and it became well again. So the Pharisees left the synagogue and met at once with some members of Herod’s party, and they made plans to kill Jesus.”** It is important to note, it was very early in Mark’s Gospel when the Pharisees and their allies began planning to kill Jesus.

Many biblical scholars have believed the Gospel of John was written long after the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and is not very historical. I have not agreed with their assessment. Those same biblical scholars have also tended to believe the decision of his enemies to kill Jesus came late during his Public Ministry. However, the previous quote from early in Mark indicates the planning of Jesus’ death began early into his Public Ministry. Further, a similar confrontation over the subject of the Sabbath between Jesus and his legalistic adversaries also took place early in the Gospel of John. Additionally, the quote from the Gospel of John includes information about the pool of five porches, which would not have been known, if John was written as late as the conventional wisdom claims. The synoptic gospels were written by authors, who did not have the same kind of historical knowledge of the settings for Jesus’ Public Ministry.

Let’s quickly review the confrontation found in **John 5:1-2** which stated, **“After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha.”** At that pool, Jesus found a man who had been ill for 38 years. He came to that pool to be healed and was never able to get in the pool in time – when the people believed an angel stirred the water, and thus, he had not been healed in all that time. Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed. After the man gave his explanation for why he had not been healed, Jesus told him in **verses 8-10**, **“Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.’ Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.”** The gospel author explained, **“The day this happened was a Sabbath, so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, ‘This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat.’”** The man didn’t want to get in trouble so he blamed his supposed breaking of the law on his healer because he told him to carry his mat. He also told them he didn’t know who healed him when they asked.

It seems Jesus was aware the man was blaming him for John explained in **verses 14-17**, **“Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, ‘Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.’”** **“Then the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. So (pause) they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is always working, and I too must work.’”** Notice, God “is always working” and Jesus must also work! Their working includes helping us human beings, because as God explained to Moses when giving him the Ten Commandments, the purpose of the Sabbath commandment was to make it, **“a day of rest dedicated to Me”**. Remember, Jesus also said the Sabbath was made for human beings and not people for the Sabbath. **God’s Agape Love and Grace is seeking to work with and through us for our welfare and to enable us to be restored in our relationship with our Divine Parent, so we can be co-creators of agape love, justice, and the creative life with God.**

Bronsink stated, “Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished.” “In the instituting of Sabbath, God ordains the unfinishedness of the creature-creator relationship.” **“God’s patience, that unanxious loving presence, is a grace that resonates to this day. It is this unfathomable depth of peace, a ‘sense of God’s wholeness’ that stills all anxieties exhaled through ‘prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,’ to quote the apostle Paul’s encouragement to the followers in the Way of Jesus in Philippi.”** “God’s own competence regarding unfinishedness becomes the very vehicle for our own capacity to remain in the creature-creation relationship, whether that be me and God, or me and my creative projects. What God makes on the seventh day is a place of promise, an environment free from anxiety, and a space to dream again. In practicing Sabbath, God made space for recreation.”

The Worship Design Studio staff wrote, “But ‘sabbath’ is a commandment. God is a God of ‘restoration.’” **“Restoring our relationship with God requires time to reconnect, time to celebrate and play, time to rest. Not to do this sends a signal that what is on the to-do list right now is more important than relationship and creating a sustainable rhythm for the long-haul of justice work.”** “And it robs us of the ability to engage in this creative process itself.” **“Rest leads to dreaming and the cycle of creativity renews.”**

This leads us into our next Worship Series, “Busy”, which begins in two weeks. [The “Busy” video trailer was shown.]

Rest in the Lord and be renewed! Amen.