

Luke 13:10-17 Bill Uetrict 8.21.25 Pentecost 11

I am going to take a risk in assuming that most of you have heard of the Ten Commandments. Maybe you can't recite them all, but you know about them. But I'll bet many of you, unless you have spent time studying the Bible with me or with someone else, don't realize that actually there are two listings of the Ten Commandments in the Bible, one in the book of Exodus and one in the book of Deuteronomy, listings that are not the same. The difference between Exodus' and Deuteronomy's treatment of the commandments that intrigues me for today's reflection is found in the wording of the third commandment about the Sabbath.

Exodus tells us that we are to honor the Sabbath because God in creation didn't show up in his office on the Sabbath. We are to rest because God rested.

But the book of Deuteronomy has a different slant. It says: "The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your donkey, your livestock, the resident alien in your town." Why? Because "you [once] were slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand."

Why are you supposed to practice Sabbath, according to Deuteronomy? Because you remember how miserable it was working all the time for those Egyptians. You are not going to impose on other people what was imposed on you. God set you free from that kind of misery. You are not going to live in it again, and you are not going to force others to live in oppression. You will practice Sabbath keeping so that social justice may be lived out. You and

everybody and everything will take a break because you are a free people.

Our first reading from Isaiah today speaks to a bunch of exiles who have come home to Jerusalem and have found this glorious city to be a big disappointment. The promise was that it was going to be great, but the greatness didn't happen. The city still looked devastated, and the temple hadn't been rebuilt. Isaiah, trying to encourage his audience, while reminding them that they have a role to play in the city and nation's renaissance, says: "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt. A good future will be established for your kids and grandkids. But that good future can't be based on social injustice, on the rich oppressing the poor, on you doing whatever you want whenever you want to do it.

The prophet says: "If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests in pursuing your own affairs, then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth."

For Isaiah, the future for the people of God will depend upon their awareness of the needs of others. It will depend upon practicing justice, living into the freedom, the delight of the Sabbath. Sabbath keeping, since it is all about freedom, will be a necessary component of a good and even prosperous future. Sabbath (literally "ceasing, "stopping") will be in part how freedom is lived out, how justice will be maintained. The well-being of the community will be dependent upon the well-being of all, and the well-being of all will not just be about you pursuing your own interests or affairs. The

delight of the Sabbath will mean that the wide distinctions between the haves and have-nots will be eliminated. The delight of the Sabbath will mean that everybody is included, that everybody can rest.

Now, isn't it interesting that something that is about delight and freedom can become in practice something that makes people crabby, something that feels nothing like freedom? Note Luke's story today. Jesus heals a woman who has been crippled for 18 years, who has been bent over and unable in any way, physically or emotionally, to stand up straight. You would think that everybody would be happy for this woman, for the freedom that she receives from Jesus who heals her. No, not the case. A crabby person, quoting the Bible complains: "There are six days on which work ought to be done; this woman ought to come on those days and get healed. We're good Jews. We honor the Sabbath."

Jesus, one who is rooted in freedom, the one who loves to set people free, responds to the crabby man and says: "You hypocrites! Don't you on the Sabbath untie your donkey and lead it to water? Ought not this woman who has been bound up for 18 long years be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath?" After all, the Sabbath is about freedom. What would be a better day to set this woman free than the Sabbath?

Ah man! Think about how in church history the Sabbath has been viewed as anything but a matter of freedom. Crabby people throughout church history worried about who is mowing their lawn or riding their bikes on Sunday. The Sabbath often became a noose placed around people's necks. You were naughty if you did work on

Sunday. You should be napping or praising the Lord. You sure shouldn't be doing anything fun.

When I was a kid, my family traveled to Michigan one summer. And for some reason, we went through Grand Rapids on a Sunday. The only thing I remembered about that city when I was a kid was that they didn't have any restaurants open. I whined and complained because I was so hungry. Those Grand Rapidians were opposed to food, and I needed it in the worst way. Sabbath keeping seemed to me as an immature and, yes, whiny child, to be a burden that made people crabby. Sabbath, that which is intended to be a delight, becomes an encumbrance, a millstone hung around the neck, something that makes us cantankerous and judgmental.

But if we are at all honest, we would admit that that really is not our issue, though. We modern ELCA Lutherans tend not to be rigid, grouchy folks who turn rocks upside down to discover the people who are mowing their lawns on Sunday. We might even be the folks who laugh a bit at the city of Zeeland who just this past week was considering whether it is okay to sell beer on Sundays. Our religious perspectives are different than the more rigid traditions. And what's more, our views and the views of many these days, even our more conservative Sabbath-keeping friends, are being shaped by a changing culture. It's a different world than it was 40 years ago.

Does that make Sabbath keeping irrelevant? Have we moved way beyond that? Are we people who are so free that we don't need to keep it in our discipleship repertoire? I suspect not. In some ways, if we understand Sabbath keeping to be about freedom, this commandment may be more vital for us than we could ever imagine. You and I are living in a time when and among a people for

whom time tyrannizes our and their lives. And Sabbath keeping is primarily about limiting and perhaps overcoming the tyranny of time.

How many people these days are frequently saying, “I just don’t have time”? For far too many of us, the clock runs our lives. We go from thing to thing to thing, from activity to activity to activity. We even have to schedule time for play for our kids, as if play is one more thing we have to add to their to-do list. Many of us have more money than we have time. We’ll write a check for something, but to give our time? We don’t have time to give time. We are tyrannized by our schedule, by the availability of 24-hour-a-day news, by time that is such a limited commodity.

Sabbath keeping is meant to be a delight. It is meant to be about freedom, freedom from the tyranny of time over our lives. God is a God of freedom. God is the one who took us out of the hands of the Egyptians, the people who kept us slaves, who made us work all the time, who tried their darnedest to control time.

But we don’t live in Egypt anymore. We live in the land of freedom. We don’t have to work all the time. We can take naps. We don’t have to schedule our kids to death. Our worth as human beings is not dependent upon our filling every moment with activities that justify our and our kids’ existence. We’re free from the tyranny of time. We can be Sabbath keepers, not so that we can make ourselves and other people miserable and crabby, but so that life can be the rich experience that it is meant to be, so that life, indeed, is the delight God made it to be, so that time doesn’t run the show.

You know, as I think about it, you and I live in light of the tyranny of time not simply because we schedule ourselves to death, but

because this thing called death makes time and its passage a matter of terror. Death makes time a threat to us. Fundamental to the Christian message is that death has been swallowed up in victory, that in the resurrection of Christ, time has been put in its appropriate place. Therefore, we can be free from its tyranny. As the book of Hebrews puts it, “A Sabbath rest remains for the people of God.” Rest for troubled bodies. Rest for a racing mind. Rest for unsettled hearts. Rest from broken relationships. Rest from the constant clamoring to prove ourselves. Rest from sin’s power over us. Rest from anxiety and fear.

So, as the book of Hebrews says, “Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest,” or as my seminary professor Leland Elhard put it: “Let us restlessly pursue the rest of God.”