

“Sabbath rest” a sermon based on Deuteronomy 5:12-15, 2 Corinthians 4:5-12 and Mark 2:23-28 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church on Sunday 3 June 2018.

There is much to do.
The to do list shouts at us.
The tasks list we make each morning.
The list that accumulates on our Outlook diary.
The reminders that show up on our phone.
The emails that need to be answered.
The books that wait to be read.
The texts that demand replies.
The calls that need to be made.
The conversations that need to be held.
The people that need contacting.
The reports that need to be filed.
The papers that need to be written.
The exams that need preparation.
They follow us around on our cellphones.

And to reinforce the importance of work are the aphorisms.

Michael Angelo “There is no greater harm than that of time wasted.” Don’t waste time!

Another – “Jesus has no hands but your hands ...” It all depends on us! If we don’t do it, no one does.

Another - as the psalmist says - God neither slumbers nor sleeps. If God neither slumbers nor sleeps, well what about us?

We sometimes add the feeling no one can do it as well as we can do it. Or they might not do it as we expect it to be done. Or by them doing it, we might lose control. So we feel the need to monitor and correct, to comment and educate.

Added to that can be a sense of obligation. We don’t want to let people down. Or let ourselves down. Or let down forbears who handed responsibilities to us. Or people who tell us that that is now how they did it.

Added to that can be dose of conscientiousness. Don’t lower your standards. Don’t disappoint people. Keep people happy.

So let me ask ... Are we feeling burdened enough? Weighed down enough? Overwhelmed enough?

And so ...

The brow becomes more furrowed.
The face becomes more fixed.
The resolve becomes more resolute.

The work becomes more consuming.
The expectations become more demanding.
The vision becomes more narrow.
The spirit becomes more earnest.
The relationships become more strained.
The ulcer becomes more noticed.
The word becomes more sharp.
The personality becomes more hard.

And we might try to fix things by trying harder because that is how we have learned how to fix things. Digging a hole.

For some people there is little choice.

Last weekend I found in a second hand book shop Professor Collie's biography of Rutherford Waddell.

For forty years until 1919 Dr Waddell was the minister of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Carroll Street. It closed in 1978. During the depression of the 1880s, Dr Waddell noticed how hard women worked for little pay.

In 1888 he preached a sermon "The sin of cheapness".

Women sewed moleskin trousers for two and a half pence per pair and even by hard work from 8:30am to 11pm could earn only 2 shillings a day.

Waddell said, pungently, "The working classes did not go to church because the capitalists prayed for them on Sundays and preyed on them during the other six days of the week."

He said these sweating conditions were caused by excessive competition and that competition was created by the enormous rage to get cheap things.

The ODT investigated. There was a government inquiry. The Tailoresses Union was formed. Waddell was its first President.

Some of the same forces are still at work - people needing to work long hours to get paid enough.

And in the middle of all these pressures, on us, on others, drops the word of God.

"Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God: you shall not do any work – you, or your son or your daughter, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

Remember that God saved you from working seven days a week so you can save yourselves and others from working seven days.

This rhythm is God's own rhythm.

From the book of Genesis, “On the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from the work that God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.”

God rested. God did nothing. God wasted time. God caught God’s breath. God enjoyed creation.

How do we enter into the rhythm of God, the rhythm of the flow of God, the rhythm of the spirit of God, the rhythm at the heart of creation?

The former lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago Lynne Baab wrote a book about keeping Sabbath. I borrow from it.

The meaning of the Hebrew word “sabbath” is “stop, cease, pause, rest, desist.”

Lynne says the first step in observing a sabbath is deciding what to stop doing.

One woman, she says, ceases from “anything that can appear on a to-do list.”

Another person says he doesn’t do anything that he might later judge by standards of productivity.

A couple in their thirties say they refrain from doing things that aren’t “peaceful.”

In one Jewish tradition, prayers of intercession are forbidden because they are too much work but prayers of thankfulness are encouraged.

The sabbath is a day to focus on the abundance of what we have been given by God rather than think about what we don’t have. People have found that the sabbath can slow us down enough to help us receive grace and peace from God to counter our exhaustion and emptiness.

So if we stop **doing**, what might help us **be** on the Sabbath?

In the Jewish tradition there can be a festive meal with candles and prayers, walks together as a family, and a short celebration at the end of the sabbath to indicate our intention to take the fragrance of the sabbath into the week.

For the psalmist, it was enough to be still.

Psalms 46:10 (NIV): “Be still, and know that I am God.”

And not just we humans, but creation itself.

My father enjoyed gardening. I noticed how each year he rotated the planting of plants around the garden. And he grew lupins that apparently produced nothing we could use. To rest the soil, to replenish the soil.

In our day of measuring costs, let’s acknowledge there is a cost to rest. People who work for themselves can calculate how much each minute is worth. But there is also a cost to not taking time out.

Barbara Brown Taylor quoting a Jewish rabbi says Sabbath needs enough time.

“... We need enough time to trust the saving rhythm of Sabbath ...

Taylor started more intentionally honouring Sabbath.

“With sundown on the Sabbath, I stopped seeing the dust balls, the bills and the laundry. They were still there, but they had lost their power over me. One day each week I lived as if all my work were done. I lived as if the kingdom had come and when I did the kingdom came, for 25 hours at least. Now, when I know Sabbath is near, I can feel the anticipation bubbling up inside of me. Sabbath is no longer a good idea or even a spiritual discipline for me. It is an experience of divine love that swamps both body and soul. It is the weekly practice of eternal life ... ”

Taking time to enter into the rhythm of God, the rhythm of the time of God, the rhythm at the heart of creation, the rhythm that lets God be God, that enjoys God, the love of God.

Matthew 11:28-30 The Message

²⁸⁻³⁰ “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.”

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**Knox Church**

449 George Street

Dunedin

New Zealand

Ph. (03) 477 0229

[www.knoxchurch.net](http://www.knoxchurch.net)

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, [minister@knoxchurch.net](mailto:minister@knoxchurch.net)