

I. Advanced Organizer - Time

A. **The first time I got pregnant, I was pretty terrified early on of what was inevitably coming.** I was excited to have a baby. I wanted to be a mother, but there was this thing I knew I had to do before I got to hold a sweet newborn in my arms. It was called giving birth. And most of what I'd heard about the experience did not make it sound like a lot of fun. From what I'd seen on tv, it was messy, it often happened in inconvenient places, and there was lots of screaming involved.

1. **People often talk about the pain of birth.** When I told my first obstetrician that, despite my fear, I was considering giving birth without pain medication so as to be more fully present to the experience, he looked at me smugly and scoffed, saying "You know its the most intense pain in human experience..." I felt his wave of judgement and it fueled my own insecurity for a moment, before I remembered that he himself had never actually birthed anything, so maybe he wasn't the best person to tell me what birth was like, or whether I could handle it.
2. **The midwife I found afterwards was much more helpful.** She didn't pretend that having a baby wasn't a lot of work...there's a reason it's called labor after all. But she understood what made this labor possible, and she could share with me the secret of it in a way that no one else had. The secret of labor was the rhythm.
3. **Yes, there would be contractions,** painful moments of tightening as a new life was brought forth from my body. **But there would also be breaks.** Times to rest between the contractions. I'd been in pain before - the pain of a bad back spasm that went on uncontrollably for hours - that felt unbearable. But **labor was a pain that was manageable, because it had a rhythm to it,** a rhythm that could carry you through the discomfort, through the weariness, through the experiences of suffering even, because it wasn't unrelenting. Whenever it hurt, you knew relief was coming.
4. Understanding that **secret of rhythm got me through not just one but three labors in my life,** all without medication. None of them were easy, but they were some of the most important experiences in my life and each of them helped teach me the importance of entering a healthy rhythm, and trusting it to carry me through whatever challenge was in my way.

B. Well...I bring all this up because **it's a new year, and the beginning of another decade,** as we are 5 days into 2020.

1. Now this is a time of year that many folks like to **make some space to reflect on the year that was and set some intentions for the year that will come.** Some of us may have made resolutions...maybe some of us have already broken them.
2. Whether or not you're a fan of New Year's Resolutions, **many of us do find it necessary at this time of year to get things in order.** There are decorations to be put away. There is a schedule to recalibrate. There are emails to catch up on, bills to pay. And perhaps, there are some healthier habits to reengage with as the year begins, things that may have fallen by the wayside in the blur of Advent and the end of year hustle and bustle.
  - a) Sometimes this ordering means **picking up a new practice** - it was at this time of year a year ago that Marie Kondo's *Tidying Up* on Netflix took off, with lots of folks, the Martens included, going through their closets to try to identify what might "spark joy", and get rid of whatever doesn't.
  - b) Other times it means getting **back to a practice or set of practices that you've learned but haven't always done consistently.** Many of us go back to the gym in January, or do it more regularly than we have in a while.

3. With that in mind, I thought it might be useful to take a couple of Sundays here at the beginning of the year to consider together some **habits of faith that we would do well to consider cultivating or re-cultivating** as the year, and for that matter, the decade, gets under way. These are things that some of us may have considered quite a bit before, but could use some review in. Or for some of us, these practices may be new, but worth considering adopting as we establish some new routines this year.
4. **And this brings me back to the idea of rhythm, of bringing order to our relationship with time itself.** That first obstetrician I met thought numbing the pain through medication was the only way of dealing with the inconvenience of labor. But my midwife understood the deeper wisdom of labor, that **it didn't need to be numbed, it needed to be followed.** There was a pattern to follow, an ordering of time to engage with, that could actually bring empowerment and strength to me.
5. The truth is, it's not just laboring mothers who need to tap into healthier rhythms. Many of us go through seasons where our relationship with time becomes disordered, where life has begun to feel unrelenting, where we feel stuck in more and more of the same challenging circumstances, every day feels like the one before and it seems like the only solution to dealing with the monotony is to numb the pain.
6. But I don't think **we're intended to live that way, in a disordered relationship with time.** If we feel caught in a mundane, despairing loop, I believe God would desire us to find freedom and life through developing a healthier relationship with the calendar. In fact, I think our tradition teaches that the Divine has been committed to that project of helping us to order our time for quite a while. And people of faith for many ages have understood this when they have chosen to observe the Sabbath.
7. If I had to wager a guess, I'd guess that **Sabbath is the law most ignored with impunity by Christians.** This has included me. Something I'm trying to grow in, and I personally go through seasons of leaning into this and experiencing the benefits of it, and then things get chaotic and I am not so protective around these practices. So I'm here as a fellow learner, as I'm also continuing to grow in more healthy ways of ordering my time.

## II. Where does the Sabbath come from?

- A. The **practice of Sabbath, the invitation for humans to order their time in a particular way is first seen in the story of Exodus. And where this practice cooers I think matters, it tells us something about the practice, because ultimately, Exodus is a story of liberation.** At its core, Exodus is a story about God setting people free from a life of slavery in Egypt. This was the primary story of identity that forms the Hebrew people. (Genesis is like a prologue; background info, but Exodus told the Hebrew people who they really were, as the ones who'd been delivered by the Divine from slavery to freedom)
  1. **At the heart of this Story: the problem presented in Exodus was slaves in Egypt live a despairing life.** Making bricks and building buildings with them day after day. Bricks. Bricks. Bricks. Building. Building. Building. And God sees this despair, hears the cries of those who are stuck, and God's heart is moved. And so this God uses signs and wonders to convince Pharaoh to let the slaves free, leads them into the desert and in the desert gives them... the Sabbath. Even before the law they are given the Sabbath. It starts with breakfast, specifically in their case: manna.
    - a) **The former slaves "labor" in the desert journey is gathering manna.** They're supposed to gather every morning, and they're not supposed to save it for the next day. If they do, it gets filled with maggots and smells bad. But God tells them once a week, there won't be any manna. On the 6th day they'll get enough for both days. See Exodus 16:21-30

**(1) 21 After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. 23 He told them, “This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the Lord. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow.”**

**24 So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. 25 Moses said, “Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the Lord. There will be no food on the ground today. 26 You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day.”**

**27 Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food. 28 The Lord asked Moses, “How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions? 29 They must realize that the Sabbath is the Lord’s gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day.” 30 So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.**

III. So this is the story that is the origin for what would become a core religious practice for the Hebrew people, and here’s what I find most interesting about it, this line: **“The Sabbath is the Lord’s Gift to You.”** It’s not supposed to be an **onerous** burden but a gift. So what’s the gift? I think its multifaceted, so we’ll consider a few gifts within the gift.

**A. First Gift: The gift of rhythm.**

1. This is the midwife’s secret. That rhythm is a gift.
2. From the beginning, the Sabbath was a radical break from the identity of slavery. It was a break from the despair of monotony; from Bricks and Bricks. They weren’t just to go from Bricks and bricks and bricks to manna and manna and manna. Instead, **God is instituting a new rhythm: Work (x6). Rest.**
3. Calls this a **Holy Sabbath**. Holy simply means “set apart” Distinctive. Unique. Of its own. There is supposed to be a day of rest that is set apart and called different. This is core to the rhythm.
4. **What is rest?** Is it just a nap? we get more of clue of what is meant by this by God when the Sabbath is described in the 10 commandments. Commandment number 4 says this:
  - a) Exodus 20:8-11  
**“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”**

- b) Here we're reminded of the foundation of the Sabbath: **God's own rest** at the end of the Creation story. **God didn't need a nap.**
- c) Hebrew word for rest, *menuha*: **joyous repose, tranquility, delight**. God needed a chance to revel in the goodness of all God had made. The Creator needed the opportunity to bask in the glory of their creation. To appreciate it, to savor it, to fall *in love* with it. God needed to inhabit this creation so the Divine could not simply produce and produce, but the Divine could also have the space to appreciate and experience and be moved by the thing that God has made. Dan Allender is a therapist, author, and professor who has done a lot of work around understanding the Sabbath, and he describes God's "rest" after creation this way:
  - (1) *"In many ways, God's rest on the seventh day of creation is paralleled by the birthing process and the period after birth, when the labor is finished yet the bonding begins. The mother and father gaze endlessly at their child, who is distinct from the parents because she is no longer merely in the mind and the womb of the mother, but external and separate. She is no longer solely in the imagination or deep in the womb; she is finally released to be held in the arms of the parent. This attachment brings mother and child into a bond that, if secure, will last through thick and thin, heartache and loss, and provide the child with an assurance that all will be well."*
- d) **Rest is more than a nap.** More than sitting quietly. It's allowing room to connect with **what's stirring in your soul**. Rest should connect you to what your work is really about. It's that which connects you to the life it is you're making. It's locking eyes with your divine parent and experiencing them reveling in you.
- e) **I have to confess that this isn't always a fun experience.** Sometimes I think we keep the routine of busyness going because to slow down and be quiet, to slow down and look in the eyes of the Divine one who cares for us, means acknowledging places in our hearts that are hurting.
- f) The truth is, in the last year, **I have at times been resisting the rhythm of Sabbath.** Because sometimes I'd rather keep moving than come to terms with what's really going on inside. As many of you know, last fall two of the closest women in my life, my one and only sister, as well as one of my best girlfriends, were both given very serious Cancer diagnoses. The last year has been about accompanying both of these dear women, both who are young mothers and have kids that are also dear to me and my kids, through very serious treatment which will likely not simply resolve neatly. When I keep moving, I don't on a day to day basis feel the impact of walking this journey with these two people I love. But when I force myself to stop. To pray. To open my heart to my creator, I feel the grief. I feel the fear. I feel the confusion. The anger. The loss. And also the longing for healing. For hope.
- g) **It's not always easy to break from life's routines and enter into rest.** But I know I need it. I know I don't want my heart to harden or become detached from the people in my life I care so deeply about. And in order to stay soft, I need to regularly make space for that kind of intentional feeling. I need the rhythm of rest. This is the only way I can not only feel the hard feelings, but that I can also experience what I think is the second gift the Sabbath is intended to bring.

## B. Second Gift: The gift of delight.

1. For Dan Allender, **that sense of revelry in creation and of entering the delight of our God is core to experiencing the Sabbath.** He calls the Sabbath, "a day of delight", a day when we are free from the constraints of work to experience the things that bring us true

pleasure, and delight, and joy, and thus connect us with our joyful, generous, loving God. And Allender doesn't seem to be just making this stuff up.

2. Look at the words of the Prophet Isaiah, regarding how the people of God should experience the Sabbath. (Message translation, Isaiah 58:13-14)

***“If you watch your step on the Sabbath,  
and don't use my holy day for personal advantage,  
If you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy,  
God's holy day as a celebration,  
If you honor it by refusing 'business as usual,'  
making money, running here and there—  
Then you'll be free to enjoy God!  
Oh, I'll make you ride high and soar above it all.  
I'll make you feast on the inheritance of your ancestor Jacob.”  
Yes! God says so!***

3. God wants us to experience a break from the monotony, a break from the need to secure what we can for ourselves, and **experience what we already have**. The break is not just for self-awareness and sleep. It is for **joy**. The break is for delight. For celebration, For play. For feasting, for partying. For **fun**.
4. Jesus gets frustrated with the religious people of his day because they seem to have lost touch with this part of the Sabbath. (Mark 2: 23-28)

***“23 One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. 24 But the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?”***

***25 Jesus said to them, “Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 26 He went into the house of God...and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions.”***

***27 Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!”***

5. Talk about an exercise in **missing the point!** The religious people had gotten **so concerned with keeping Sabbath correctly**, with figuring out what qualifies as work and what doesn't, what you can and can't do, that they've **forgotten the joy**. They've forgotten the delight. They've forgotten the GIFT. Sabbath keeping has become a way of proving yourself to be a good, righteous Jew. How well you keep the Sabbath has become a means of testifying your devotion, and identifying the heretics who don't keep it as well as you. **But this, too, is WORK**. They've just traded the God's pattern for an old familiar one. **Work (x6) and then...religious work.**
  - a) **This can be a temptation for us too.** Many of us who grew up in the church understood going to church or serving in church on Sunday as being fulfilling the Sabbath. And sure, it could be part of it, but clearly what Jesus intended for us was more than simply what we experience in an hour on Sunday, as good as that hour might be.
  - b) This is part of why I believe I personally have found **our model of doing this gathering only twice a month very helpful for many of us here at Haven for experiencing Sabbath more holistically**. Because certainly our worship here can be an important

sabbath practice. But for many of us who are busy doing the stuff of helping this gathering happen, when we were doing it every week at times it felt simply like more work. While I won't speak for what our community might want to do in the future, at least in this season of our life, I think in this season only holding two gatherings of this sort a month has helped us keep a better balance so we can experience the gift and the joy of these gatherings as well as other kinds of sabbath experiences.

- c) **The Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus day missed the point of the Sabbath because they put the emphasis in the wrong place.** As they outwardly proclaim the importance of the law, and focus on the minutia of its lettering, they decimate the Spirit of it. And Jesus is frustrated because it was never supposed to be that way.

### C. Third Gift: the Gift of Inclusive Community.

1. **Some religious leaders in Jesus' time were using the Sabbath as a means of division;** a way of demonstrating who was in and who was out. Jesus and his followers must be out because Jesus heals people on the Sabbath. And he picks grain and eats it. **But that very act of Division is also counter to the spirit and the heart of what Sabbath practice was about.** Sabbath was never supposed to be about an individual taking a day to build up their own self-righteousness. **Sabbath is about holistic inclusive community.** It's about relationship. It's about laying down division and coming to feast at the same table. It's about connection.
2. Sabbath was for EVERYONE. **"no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you."** (from Ex. 20). No one is excluded: no slaves, no foreigners, kids and adults, no animals work - everyone parties on the sabbath. Everyone plays on the sabbath. All at the same table: master and servant eating together. We all do this together. We're all in it together. For a day every week we're all the same class.
3. Theologian Walter Bruegemann talks in his book *The Sabbath as Resistance* about how the sabbath invites communities to resist exclusivism. Resist exclusionary practices. He says it this way: *"That is because Sabbath represents a radical disengagement from the producer-consumer rat race of the empire. The community welcomes members of any race or nation, any gender or social condition, so long as that person is defined by justice, mercy, and compassion, and not competition, achievement, production, or acquisition."*
4. **The full inclusion that the Sabbath was meant to embody even included the land.** Greta Thunberg would approve. The ancient Israelites were supposed to give the land a sabbath every 7 years, once they got to the Promised Land. Work the land for 6 years, and then take a 7th year off. **Sabbath is an inclusive concept: everyone needs to rest. Even the land.**

D. **So we have a heritage,** a gift called the Sabbath that has often been overlooked, particularly by followers of Jesus. As a new decade begins, it's a gift that I think many of us would be helped by acquainting ourselves with. Cause y'all, I have a feeling this year, this decade... there's gonna be heavy labor involved. It is work to bring new things to life. We are regularly invited to despair, to fall into the monotonous loop and feel the temptation to numb the pain. But perhaps this gift of Sabbath, with its rhythm, its delights, its community, might be an important part of finding the empowerment and strength we need for the challenges ahead.

IV. If you think that might be true for you, then I'd love to end by offering you **3 Sabbath Practices to Re-order Your Relationship With Time**

A. **Find your rhythm.**

1. Doesn't have to be religious. Could be Saturday, could be Sunday, could be Wednesday. Whatever you can do to have a consistent day a week that is set apart for connection with God and the world around you. (If possible, a whole day, but if need be, could be less. Parents of small kids, we have to be creative.)

**B. Engage your senses**

1. How might you connect with the delights of creation, to "taste and see that the Lord is good".?
  - a) what are the sights, sounds, tastes, touches that make you feel most alive, full of delight, connected to God and the universe around you? Engage them with intentionality.
    - (1) hike, swim, take long walks in beautiful places
    - (2) eat good meals, drink good wine or beer - feast with abundance
    - (3) enjoy the feel of soft pajamas, warm blanket, and coffee in the morning
    - (4) Consider a digital sabbath - turn off the phone so you can be more present to the created world around you

**C. Find your people.**

1. If one of the gifts of the sabbath is inclusive community, then part of how we observe it is living into that gift. So who will you share the day with? Who might you host at your table, or who might you join at theirs?

**D. Ending: guided meditation and prayer...**

**Questions for Reflection and Conversation**

1. When have you found intentional rhythms to be helpful?
2. What has your experience been around Sabbath practice?
3. What "gifts of the Sabbath" that were shared most resonate with you? Which were most surprising?