

I. Advanced Organizer-

A. **We started talking about Stress.** A lot of us are feeling stress: stress of life; added stress in this season with everything going on in our country.

1. Just this week, more stressful stories:

a) particular stress if you are an **immigrant**. Questions about status. Questions about safety. Questions about welcome.

(1) A man detained in Chicago this week who is a US Citizen, born in Puerto Rico; technically part of the United States. Detained for days; he has brown skin. Features that look Mexican. For our friends of color that is stressful. For those aren't affected but feel it; what do we do? How do we help? Throughout the Bible, God calls us to welcome the immigrants and refugees among us. To shelter them. What does that mean in this space?

b) **Stress around safety for transgendered kids.** We have transgendered folks in our church; one of the greatest parts of pastoring is pastoring a safe trans-inclusive church. What does it mean that the current administration is taking steps to remove protections for trans persons? Where does that go next? For people of faith who see in the Bible, Jesus standing with the excluded, preaching on behalf of the vulnerable, touching those that society deems untouchable - folks with leprosy or the social stigma of prostitution or tax collection - how do we practically participate in resisting policies that oppress sexual and gender minorities?

2. There aren't easy answers to these questions. There is work to be done, lots of work to be done to bring safety and what the Bible calls shalom - meaning peace, well being, holistic wellness - to our people, to our communities, to our country. The amount of work can be overwhelming, and we can find ourselves getting exhausted and paralyzed before we begin.

3. In this season, it's as important as ever that **we find ways to care for ourselves and for our souls**. That's what this mini-series is about.

4. Last week, we looked at the self-care of Jesus. His habit of engagement and withdrawal. Today, we're gonna pull back and look at the practice that was the backdrop for Jesus' practice of withdrawal. It's a practice we all acknowledge, but if you're like me, many of us struggle to meaningfully implement regularly. **I'm talking about Sabbath.**

5. As we reflect today on the practice of Sabbath and it's connection to caring for our soul, we're going to get some help and inspiration from scholar Walter Brueggemann, who connects Sabbath not just to caring for your soul but to resistance. He has a book I've recently read for inspiration called, **Sabbath as Resistance**. Gonna be leaning on it heavily today. Now Brueggeman isn't talking explicitly about resistance to a particular leader or administration. He's talking about Sabbath as resistance to a whole framework of life. But as we explore the components of that framework that Brueggeman lays out, I think we'll find connections to our current struggles, as well as hope that in caring for our selves and our souls we are participating in the work of healing and restoration of the world around us.

II. Any discussion of the Sabbath, makes sense to begin with the introduction of it in the Biblical account. For this, we look to the 10 commandments.

A. **God spoke all these words:**

2 "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding

to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, 6 and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold guiltless anyone who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. 9 For six days you may labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that you may live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving to you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

- B. I start by reading all ten of these, because all of them are in some way connected. They all point to what is rightly summed up with two commandments. Jesus said them this way: ***‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40).*** Focus on “love God” - reflected in first three commandments, and focus on love of the neighbor in commandments five through ten. The fourth commandment, **the Sabbath commandment is the bridge.**

1. Sabbath concerns worship and connection to God, the practitioner is invited to rest as God rested.
2. But it is not just about the individual and God. **Sabbath was a communal experience.** We’ll touch on this more in a bit, but with all who are included, we can see that the sabbath has concerns for the neighborhood, not just the individual.
3. Like all the commandments, the **commandment to Sabbath has the background of slavery in Egypt in mind.** With the law, God is establishing an alternative way of being, an alternative community that is different than the communal life lived in Egypt.
 - a) The social life in Egypt is best understood by the **architecture it was famous for: the pyramid.**
 - (1) This reflected their social reality. At the top was the Pharaoh. He had all the power, concentrated in one person.. They were all at the bottom.
 - b) But now, the people were no longer the people of Pharaoh. They were the people of Yahweh, and Yahweh is a different kind of leader. He wanted his followers to understand that holistically, intuitively, kinesthetically. And part of how he wanted his people to understand that was through living in a new rhythm; a rhythm which wasn’t ruled by anxiety, acquisition, and the need to concentrate power. It’s a rhythm that honored care of the self. A rhythm that honored unity with creation and with God. A rhythm that honors rest.
 - c) Brueggeman points to the ways in which Sabbath instructed Yahweh’s people about their God’s character. He says it this way:

(1) *“That divine rest on the seventh day of creation has made clear (a) that YHWH is not a workaholic, (b) that YHWH is not anxious about the full functioning of creation, and (c) that the well-being of creation does not depend on endless work. This performance and exhibit of divine rest thus characterize the God of creation, creation itself, and the creatures made in the image of the resting God. Creation is to be enacted and embraced without defining anxiety. Indeed, such divine rest serves to delegitimize and dismantle the endless restlessness sanctioned by the other gods and enacted by their adherents.”*

(2) In Brueggemann’s reading, the performance of Sabbath is the performance of resistance to all other gods and idols, and a performance of worship to the resting Creative God Yahweh. To practice Sabbath is to publicly enact a counter identity that is alternative. Enact something different than the mainstream. That applies today as much as it did for the Ancient Hebrews. In Brueggemann’s words, *“Understood in this way, Sabbath is a bodily act of testimony to alternative and resistance to pervading values and the assumptions behind those values.”*

III. What specifically is being resisted? Throughout his book Brueggemann identifies some specific powerful forces in the ancient world, and in ours, that practice of the Sabbath seeks to subvert. He focuses on 4 things we will look at quickly today.

A. **Resistance to Anxiety** - for the ancients, their perception of reality is shaped by the system they are in and the insatiable anxiety it produces.

1. Back to the pyramid -

(1) **Pharaoh was ruled by anxiety and a need to acquire more and more security.** He’s continually worried there won’t be enough food in the store houses, needs to acquire more and more security. Needs to exploit all those beneath him to do it.

(2) **At the bottom were masses of people forced to work without ceasing to bolster the power of those at the top.** The Pharaoh continually required more and more work from his slaves, anxiously insisting it was never enough. Upping the brick quota, while those who were oppressed struggled more and more to meet the ceaseless demand of insatiable desire.

(3) **The whole system is riddled with anxiety.**

2. Sabbath is an alternative to this kind of anxious living. It’s an invitation to a life of cooperation with God, not anxious slavery to Him. People are invited to tend creation and to trust in the creator’s abundant provision.

3. You see this relationship in some of the Psalms:

a) ***“All of your creatures wait for you to provide them with food on a regular basis. 28 You give food to them and they receive it; you open your hand and they are filled with food.”*** (Ps. 104:27-28)

b) ***“Everything looks to you in anticipation, and you provide them with food on a regular basis. 16 You open your hand, and fill every living thing with the food they desire.”*** (Ps. 145:15-16)

B. **Resistance to Coercion** - remember the communal portion of the Sabbath command:

1. ***“you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates”***

a) this is an experience of communal equity and justice. Whatever your social station, you have a right, a guaranteed right to rest.

b) resistance to exploitive work practices. Resistance to oppression.

c) Brueggemann: *"Sabbath is the great day of equality when all are equally at rest."*

C. **Resistance to Exclusivism** - while the adoption of the Law does create a people which is distinctive and countercultural, it is not meant to establish a system that is exclusive and protective of its membership. This is illustrated beautifully in the work of prophets like Isaiah.

1. ***"No foreigner who becomes a follower of the Lord should say,***

'The Lord will certainly exclude me from his people.'

The eunuch should not say,

'Look, I am like a dried-up tree.'"

4 For this is what the Lord says:

"For the eunuchs who observe my Sabbaths

and choose what pleases me

and are faithful to my covenant,

5 I will set up within my temple and my walls a monument

that will be better than sons and daughters.

I will set up a permanent monument for them that will remain.

6 As for foreigners who become followers of the Lord and serve him,

who love the name of the Lord and want to be his servants—

all who observe the Sabbath and do not defile it,

and who are faithful to my covenant—

7 I will bring them to my holy mountain;

I will make them happy in the temple where people pray to me.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar,

for my temple will be known as a temple where all nations may pray."

8 The sovereign Lord says this,

the one who gathers the dispersed of Israel:

"I will still gather them up." (Isaiah 56:3-8)

2. This is a development in the life of the people, to move from being exclusive to inclusive. But the Biblical story is a story of a people who make this shift. And what is the one condition for membership? Keeping of the Sabbath. Why?

a) *"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."* Brueggemann

D. Resistance to Multitasking

1. Must remember, restfulness of Sabbath is an act of resistance to acquiring commodity...taking in more stuff, efficiently producing for self-preservation.

2. Over time, the Sabbath observance became another event to build profit around. Prophets begin to critique fasts and festivals that the people observe, while they are exploiting their workers, and not caring for the needs of the vulnerable.

3. Even while observing Sabbath, focus was completely on producing more, acquiring more. This is especially evident in the words of Amos:

a) ***"Listen to this, you who trample the needy,***

and do away with the destitute in the land.

5 You say,

"When will the new moon festival be over, so we can sell grain?

When will the Sabbath end, so we can open up the grain bins?

We're eager to sell less for a higher price,

and to cheat the buyer with rigged scales!

**6 We're eager to trade silver for the poor,
a pair of sandals for the needy!**

We want to mix in some chaff with the grain!" (Amos 8:4-8)

4. Brueggemann sees in this a version of the need so many of us feel to multitask. But while we may think we're simply being uber-efficient, he points out that multi-tasking has a dark underside.

a) *"Multitasking is the drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness. Such practice yields a divided self, with full attention given to nothing."* - Brueggemann

- E. **Story of going to the mountains.** Last week. No phone service; kind of freaked Jason and I out. Ended Up being a blessing. Just time with the kids. Adventure looking for snow. Sledding in a snow storm. Drinking hot chocolate and playing board games in front of the fire. Being together. As we drove down that mountain, I felt clearer and less anxious than I had in a long time.
- F. **Follow up this week: anxiety around needing to buy a new car.** Super stressful experience. Health issue with a family member I love deeply and am close to. In the midst of it, a prayer experience where Jesus is communicating his presence in our day in the snow, and his invitation to me to let go of all the things that make me anxious, to for a moment let go of the places I feel coerced, let go of the anger I have over exclusion around me, let go of my need to multitask and just play. Receive and play.
- G. Sabbath is not just a day off. Sabbath is not just an excuse not to do the laundry. **Sabbath is an act of care of the self, and of the community. *because it is an act of resistance: to anxiety, coercion, exclusivism, multitasking, and all the empires that would try to take over our lives.*** If you want to stand in resistance to them, and unity with the God of Creation, Yahweh. Care for your self. Care for your soul. And regularly, take time to experience undivided rest.

IV. Transition to Celia