

LOVING OURSELVES

Leviticus 25:1-7 NRSV

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INTRODUCTION

I'm going to start off this sermon by saying, this may perhaps be the most hypocritical sermon I have ever given, or maybe a better way to put it is the most confessional. I deeply believe everything I am going to say and I am very far from living it out in practical ways. So let's work on this together. 📖

A few weeks ago I got my haircut. I sat down in the chair, more like I collapsed into it. I didn't realize how tired I was. It was one of the few times that week that I could sit and just be. There was nothing that I was supposed to do in that moment. So I relaxed into it. I breathed. It was exactly what I needed. We all need those moments to quit doing and just be.

LOVING OURSELVES

Love your neighbor as yourself. We often focus on loving our neighbor and that is wonderful. But, I think perhaps we neglect the second half of that command...to love ourselves. What does that look like to love ourselves? It sounds conceited on one hand. It sounds like pride. It sounds selfish. It does not sound like service, self-sacrifice, or humility that Jesus calls us to. And yet, it is part of the command. Jesus could have said, "Love your neighbor (period)." But Jesus adds that sneaky little phrase, "love yourself."

Loving ourselves includes valuing ourselves, seeing ourselves as the masterpiece God created us as Maren shared with us. Loving ourselves is valuing our bodies as Sami shared with us. Loving ourselves is letting go of regret and shame, forgiving ourselves as Dominic shared last week. Today, we see that loving ourselves is taking care of ourselves. For taking care of ourselves is in an essential part of taking care of others. The healthier the tree – the better the fruit it can offer. (FB or Instagram meme)

Loving ourselves is not selfish, it is faithful. How is your self-care these days?

LEVITICUS

Today I chose a passage from Leviticus. I'm not sure I have ever preached from Leviticus before! Leviticus is a guidebook for holy living. It gets a bad rap because it is tedious to read, it contains SO many rules. And so many of those rules seem irrelevant to us. And indeed, they are foreign to our modern culture. After all, who cares if we wear garments of mixed fibers as it prohibits in Lev. 19:19? Though, there are lots of important guidelines in Leviticus, so we can't just blow off the whole book. It is essential then, when reading Leviticus, to look at the intent of each rule, the everlasting truth in it. And then to interpret that in such a way it relates to modern day living.

Leviticus is set at the base of Mount Sinai and through it God is teaching the people how to live as God's faithful people. It takes place after Israel's dramatic exit from Egypt, the nation camped at the foot of Mount Sinai for 2 years to recover. I imagine part of this time was about God teaching them how to live, in freedom and holiness after living in slavery for several generations. It was a season for resting, renewing, learning, building. In that context hear these words of Lev. 25:1-7

Leviticus 25:1-7 NRSV

25 *The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: ² Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. ³ Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; ⁴ but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. ⁵ You shall not reap the after growth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. ⁶ You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; ⁷ for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.*

This passage anticipates when they will be living in the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, in an agricultural society. When they do, God wants them to give the land a rest every 7 years. To allow the land to lie fallow, free from any cultivated crop. There was a practical reason then which I would guess is still true today. Then, the water in the area had high sodium content. So, allowing the field to be natural for one year of every 7, gave the land a rest and allowed its soil to rejuvenate, to let the Ph levels balance. The benefit to the land is to retard the rate of salinization caused by irrigation. I am not an expert in agricultural practices, but I'm sure there is wisdom even for crops today, to rest the land, give it a break to rejuvenate.

For those of us hearing this today who are farmers, perhaps you can interpret this literally, allowing your fields to lie fallow every 7 years. But for the rest of us, the question is, "what does it mean for us to apply this guideline for agricultural practice into our living pattern? How do we take up this rhythm of rest in our life?"

SABBATH

The land needs to rest. So do we. God teaches us that over and over. Beginning in Genesis 1. The first creation story tells us that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in it in 6 days and then rested on the 7th. It's not that God was totally exhausted and needed a nap. It's more about the nature of God and us, and all of creation. We need rest. Creation needs rest. Rest is part of the rhythm of life. Rest is essential to life, to vitality.

In Exodus 20, the 10 commandments remind us to observe the sabbath and keep it holy. And God is very clear, no one is to work that day. Protecting the laboring class. It's not just that the head of household is not to work, but God specifically says, your servants and animals should not work either. This is challenging for us in our 24/7, 365 consumeristic culture. We are driven to produce, to make a profit, to consume, to be served so that everything is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. And, our culture engages in this conversation around Thanksgiving and Black Friday over what businesses are open and when. But no matter what our culture does, we need to decide how we are going to live. For this pressure in our capitalistic society is not the rhythm God suggests for us. God says, your value does not come from your production, you are more than the work you do, so take time to rest. Renew, rejuvenate. Take a break. Be.

That is what I was able to do in the hairstylist's chair that day, to just be. And it felt so good, even if only for a half hour. Yet, when I hear about sabbath practices, I have all kinds of excuses and I get defensive. If that is your reaction to suggestion of sabbath, you need to join me in reflecting on why that is. What is driving us so much we can't let our fields lie fallow once every 7 years?

For that is how God designed us; to work hard, to serve, and to rest. To love others, and to love ourselves. We are called to work hard. We are called to serve generously. But we can get so consumed by working and serving that we don't take time to just be and take care of ourselves.

Rev. J. Dana Trent writes, "Sabbath is the idea that we work 6 days and rest on the 7th. That one day of rest informs the other six because it offers time for **reflecting** on our lives, **reconnecting** with

loved ones, **restoring** our bodies and minds. Sabbath is a practice as other ancient tools such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, for helping us cope with everyday stress. Instead of counting the days and weeks until another vacation, through Sabbath we can discover windows of time now when we switch off, step into sacred time, we can tune in to God one another, and ourselves.” (*DevoZine* Set/Oct 2018 p.60)

The question is, how do you practice sabbath? When do you let your fields lie fallow? (*Pause...*)

My daughter Amanda sent me this beautiful picture of the beach early Friday morning. ([St.Paul's put slide up here](#)) I told her I'm glad you take advantage of being close to the beach. And she responded, she goes every Friday morning. She gets up early, gets Starbucks, and goes to the beach, and sits on the wall before work. That's letting her field lie fallow, that is a wonderful rhythm of rest in her week. What might that look like for you? For me?

Here are some wise words to guide us in finding a pattern of sabbath. “Turn everything off at least once a week – including your brain. Then sit quiet somewhere and just chill out.” (*FB meme, or Insta, elephant journal or Mindful Christianity*)

We do not rest because our work is done. We rest because God teaches us to. I'm going to say that again, because I need to hear it. We do not rest because the work is done. We rest because God teaches us to.

HOLIDAY

As we approach the holiday season...I encourage you to plan ahead. How can you practice Sabbath, protect time to rest and reflect? In the midst of family gatherings, social parties, special events, baking, shopping, etc., etc., etc. ... How can you include rest in your rhythm of life over the holidays?

FORTIFYING OUR RIVER BANKS

Creating space in our lives for rest is tough. It's not like we are choosing to eliminate all these horrible activities from our lives. For the most part, I would guess our lives are consumed with worthy things. But, to love ourselves, to care for our spirit, we much make choices. Say No. Set boundaries, limits. I came across a helpful metaphor (Linda Douty) That our lives are like a river, full of activity, vitality, chaos even. Flowing moving. The setting limits, establishing boundaries, saying no, resting, all builds the banks. Rivers need banks to contain the water. When the water flows over the river banks, floods happen, destruction. Water contained in the river banks is powerful, but life giving. Water spilling over is life destroying.

How can you fortify the river banks in your life? What will it look like to allow your field to lie fallow every 7th year? How can you establish a rhythm of work and rest?

In times of solitude, times of sabbath, times of rest, we discover that being is more important than having. We discover that we are worth more than the results of our efforts. Time of rest puts things in perspective. (Henri Nouwen *Out of Solitude* p.22)

JESUS

Jesus had strong river banks. He worked hard. He was under much demand. He healed, taught, showed compassion and mercy to more people than we can fathom. But he also had limits as a human being. Jesus took time to rest, even when the work wasn't all done. In the gospel of Mark, chapter 1, we read about the details of a busy day in the life of Jesus. He began the day by going to the synagogue with his disciples and teaching there. Then he healed a guy with an evil spirit. Then after worship, he went to Simon and Andrew's home for lunch. While there he discovered their mother

was sick, so he ministered to her. Then crowds came, and into the evening he healed all who came. Then it says the next morning he got up early and went to a lonely place to pray. The disciples were frantically looking for Jesus. They finally found him and said, "Jesus, we have to get back to the people. They need your help!" To which Jesus responded, "no, we are going to another town today, so I can preach there. For that is why I have come." I'm sure that caught the disciples by surprise. Why would they leave all those needy people and go to a new town? In Jesus' time alone, he renewed his spirit, gained perspective, received direction, and was sure of his purpose and next step. That is what can happen when we step aside and rest on a regular basis. Especially in the most demanding of times. Jesus shows us how to live in this rhythm of grace. Rhythm of work and rest that was established at the beginning of time. Sabbath. Jesus calls us to the work of loving others – but also to time of rest and renewal.

Listen to Jesus' words, ²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 NRSV

Or in The Message

²⁸⁻³⁰*"Are you tired? Worn out? 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."*

That is what I long for. Don't you?

A real rest, walking and working with Jesus, unforced rhythm of grace. Living freely and lightly.

How do we find that? Sabbath. Rest.

Will you join me in seeking this rhythm of work, service, and rest? Will you challenge me to take a sabbath?

What does it look like to let your fields lie fallow this holiday season?

Let us love ourselves fully as Jesus does.

Jesus Loves Me