

Food for the Journey

15 March 2015: Lent 4 (Year B)

First United Methodist Church of Arlington, TX

“Taking Time for the Journey”

Preaching Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

“Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time
we have rushed through life trying to save”

(Will Rogers, 1879 - 1935).

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When we talk about taking time for the journey we are speaking about Sabbath Time. In Ephesians 2:1-10 the writer advises that all things are in Christ and that we who take this gift seriously also take time to abide as a faith community. In order to respond to a gift of this magnitude from God, we need time to enjoy it. Try to imagine that God as our parent observing us unwrap our Christmas presents. We watched our own small children in that setting too— simply unwrapping one thing and quickly move on to the next “bright, shiny object.” We have all watched our children do that and were disappointed that they did not seem overly interested in what we gave them. “Sabbath Rest” is an opportunity to spend time with God and rest from our work.

Our church’s catchphrase has been: “Come—Worship; Stay—Learn; Go—Serve.” This slogan stresses our three values: the worship of God, the learning/fellowship of Sunday school, and the service that the Lord requires of us: “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” (to paraphrase Micah 6:8). We not only worship God and attend Sunday school, but we encourage spiritual/biblical growth opportunities. Thus we keep life in balance as disciples by attending to our lesson and the gift it describes:

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places

in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:1-10).

One of the finest statements about God’s manifold gifts given us is this one that reads: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” But a gift this big—our salvation—must have some means of grasping it. How do we receive such a gift—this lavish? A regular and logical way of being grateful is a means. Aristotle offers what Exodus provided 800 years before. Exodus called it the 10 Commandments, but Aristotle sounded more modern when he wrote about habits: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” The 10 Commandments help us develop habits in gratitude for God’s gift of salvation to us and for us.

There are several bedrock habits of Western Civilization. One habit is especially difficult to establish in our contemporary culture even for Christians—it cuts in fact against the grain of conventional wisdom. This habit is Sabbath keeping. Marva Dawn described keeping the Sabbath as an exercise in **ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting** (*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Eerdmans, 1989). As Christian disciples we follow our Hebrew forbears by observing Sabbath: we rest and we remember. We rest because God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3). In addition to resting we also remember what God has done for us. Concretely for the Hebrews this involved bringing the Exodus story to awareness. For those who claim Christ, the task is to recall Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection. By remembering such events in Christ’s life we bring clarity and thanksgiving to our own life. Yet it takes time to rest and to remember. Have you ever heard someone tell you to “sleep fast?” Have you ever tried to remember something in a conversation

and have someone suggest “Hurry up, and remember?”—not helpful. Take your time and remember these words:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Sabbath keeping’s chief principles are these: **ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting**. Each of these values focuses on Exodus 20. Ceasing [from Shabbat—to cease/desist] means faithful people break from anxiety, work, worry, accomplishment, greed, and so on. Sabbath keeping in the 10 Commandments (Ex 20; Deut 5) sits between “you shall not make wrong use of the Lord’s name” and “honor your father and your mother.” The demand relating to Sabbath keeping balances us, in that “ceasing” both divinely and persuasively mandates a break in our work. This interruption of our “business as usual” routine offers us a sense of the other six days’ wonder and blessing.

A second principle for Sabbath keeping is rest. Resting too pertains to balance. The idea of rest is no doubt for our physical bodies, but more than that too. God can work in us most effectively—and we can respond to God most faithfully—when we are wholly in tune with God. Too many of us are distracted by the 1000s of things that divert our attention. All of us are guilty of failing to rest on the Sabbath, but as God conceived Sabbath rest, God saw it as a foretaste of eternal life. At times the root of any problem is that we are simply too tired—either physically or mentally—to address it. As I have often said: “When in doubt, take a nap—then address your issues.”

A third principle for Sabbath keeping is embracing. Embracing means clearing time for God and for family. Embracing time allows nurture for the most important relationships in life. We are not simply producers of materials or of information. Rather God creates us to experience relationship with the divine and with others. The principle of “embracing” guards against two conditions that slip up on people who work too hard—*anomie* and *ennui*. Anomie

means “personal unrest, alienation, and uncertainty that comes from a lack of purpose or ideals.” Likewise ennui is “a feeling of utter weariness and discontent resulting from boredom or lack of interest.” Anomie and ennui signal that something in life is amiss. Yet at today’s speed people accept this descriptor of American life as simply one of life’s “givens.” Sabbath allows time to embrace God in worship and each other in fellowship—God time and family time. Embracing our calling in life means—we not just producers—we are related.

Finally, the last principle of our fourfold set of **ceasing, resting, and embracing** is the principle of **feasting**. Feasting is simply the enjoyment of life. It means taking the time to take pleasure in life by rejoicing in food and beauty. Sabbath offers us permission and time to rejoice in music and the arts—rejoice in nature—rejoice in slowing down to be. It means what the worship title suggests: “Taking Time for the Journey.” We can enjoy what God created us to be. Our modern hi-tech society deprives us of these gifts and life can soon morph into lost intimacy with God, ourselves, and others. Thus, in a culture that sees church, faith, religion, and spirituality as modern kill-joys, ironically the church uses Sabbath to reconnect. We reconnect by Sabbath feasting. The primary principles of Sabbath keeping are: **ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting**. These are God’s Sabbath gifts to us. Soon we enter Holy Week at Lent’s conclusion. During our Lenten wilderness wanderings with Jesus we may focus on who God is and who we are. Many folks have practiced the spiritual disciplines: “Taking Time for the Journey,” Sabbath keeping, Fasting, Spiritual Reading, Worship, and Prayer. Too often in today’s climate of consumerism we only think about what we want—from our jobs, from our families, from our schools, and from our churches. The point of discipleship is not to ask what God has done for us, but rather to offer ourselves God. We only offer ourselves as we look up to God from the foot of the cross. From this eternal perspective we can better understand what God in Christ has already done for us.

Our lives, if lived out of that love of God for us, remind us that to be God’s person is to live

in gratitude for the greatest of all possible gifts—the love of God in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2 certainly summarizes this gift of God’s love. If we are too busy to **cease, rest, embrace, and feast**, then we are certainly too busy to remember what God has done and is doing for us today.

Use your Sabbath gift wisely. Take your time and remember these words:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.