



March 29, 2020
Pastor Mark Toone

Defiant Hope: Our Rest Various texts

Good morning Chapel Hill and welcome to worship! It still astounds me to think that this service is reaching all across our region and around the world. I heard from a couple stationed in Okinawa who were so grateful to worship with their church in Gig Harbor. I'm also hearing expressions of gratitude from so many of you who have been called by one of our elders or deacons or pastors. It is our goal to check on every single person who calls Chapel Hill home...and to offer any assistance we can. If you need anything, let us know! And if you haven't heard from us, we may need your information!

Here's what I believe will result from this: the people of Chapel Hill are going to come through this with a deeper sense of connection to their church family than ever before. So...hang in there...keep calm.... carry on! We're in this together!

Raise your hand if you watched the Governor's speech Tuesday night. I see that hand...I see that hand. For many of us, this "shelter at home" order didn't change much. But I couldn't help but think of you extroverts who are already going stir-crazy. One young dad described their home as "mayhem." And a mom I know who thrives on being with people has found this isolation to be emotionally draining... not to mention the fear of her husband losing his job. For many of us, this has been tough.

But I'll admit it; I'm an introvert. AND...I really like my wife and enjoy being with her. AND we don't have children at home. AND we can take walks in the Harbor. AND... since I've been banned from the office because, apparently, I'm too old...I've been able to make hundreds of phone calls and write more than usual, including my nightly blog. SO....my experience of this lock-down is WAYYYYY different than many of you, especially those of you who are trying to entertain and educate little ones, 24/7.

STILL...with that in mind....I'd like to propose a thesis. And before you throw your orange juice glasses at the screen, hear me out: I believe we could look back upon this lock-down as a once-in-a-lifetime gift. Because this season of solitude and limited activity is forcing us to grapple with the only one of the Ten Commandments we consider optional: the Fourth Commandment; "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." We find that commandment in Exodus 20:8 ff. I invite you to join out loud as I read this text:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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, your male servant, or your female servant, or

your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

There once was a time when Sabbath was a thing in the United States. Stores closed, few restaurants were open, churches were full, sports fields were empty. In most of our country, those days are long past. But not in Israel. If you travel with me to Israel you will discover that Sabbath is STILL a real thing. It is called "Shabbat." Every other day of the week you greet someone with "Shalom." But on the Sabbath you say, "Shabbat Shalom." Why not turn to the people around you and say, "Shabbat Shalom."

We fly into Tel Aviv on Shabbat because the airport is quiet. Israeli hotels are famous for their opulent breakfasts...but not on Shabbat. All the breakfast items are cold and the cappuccino machine has a tent over it. Why? Because, if you push the button to make cappuccino, that is considered work and is therefore forbidden. In high-rise hotels, you want to avoid the Shabbat elevator; otherwise, you will stop automatically at every single floor so that you don't have to push the buttons.

This may sound extreme and maybe even ridiculous... but only because we have all but eliminated this commandment from the list. In America, we have pretty much whittled it down to the "Nine Commandments." But there really were Ten, once.

There are several things I want you to see about the Sabbath Commandment. First, it is the longest of all the commandments. It has more explanation than any other. Obviously the Lord felt like he needed to drum this one home. Apparently, he was right.

Second, it is the only commandment with a "why" attached to it. Why should we cease work on one day out of every seven? Because God, after creating the entire universe in six days, took the seventh day to rest. We will come back to what "rest" means in a moment, but this rhythm of six on, one off...is woven into the fabric of creation.

Third, it is the only commandment mentioned in the creation story of Genesis. The Lord creates Adam and Eve on the sixth day... then rests on the seventh day...and commands them to do so, too. Think about that. Adam and Eve have not yet done any work from which to rest. And yet, on their very first full day of life...they are given the gift of rest. That is, the gift of simply being with each other and enjoying the presence of God. Notice this: the gift of Sabbath rest preceded the gift of good work. In other words, "rest" means something more than just regaining strength after being exhausted. Isaiah talks about the Sabbath as "a delight." Real Sabbath rest means learning to delight...to bask...in the love of our heavenly father...and in our love for each other.

Here's the fourth thing I would say about the 4th commandment: it is the only one we not only don't obey...we consider it virtuous to disobey. "I can't possibly take a Sabbath day; I have too much work to do," we say. And everyone nods their head in approval.

I'm reading a book called *Subversive Sabbath* by A.J. Swoboda. He is a pastor and he takes a pointed shot at workaholic pastors. "...If I were to cheat on my wife, I would lose my job. If I stole from the church, I would be run out of town. If I lied about the church finances, I would be in huge trouble. If I worshiped another god, I'd be removed. There are nine commandments that, if I chose to break, I might lose my ministry over. But if I did not keep a Sabbath day, I would probably get a raise." (p 71)

The word "Sabbath" means, literally, "stop!" Just stop. Stop doing what you ordinarily do the other six days of the week. Stop, rest, worship, renew, delight. This rhythm of seventh day rest is reinforced elsewhere in the Old Testament. Did you know that every seventh year was intended to be a year of rest when fields would lie fallow? And every 49 years...seven times seven years...was called Jubilee. In that year, every debt was cancelled, every slave was freed and all land was returned to its original owner.

This commandment was revolutionary. In every other world religion of the time, humans were viewed as slaves, created to work non-stop for the pleasure of the gods. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they had no day off. The idea that God would say, "I WANT to give my children rest one day out of every week. I want them to delight in their relationship with me and with each other...." ... that was revolutionary!

This need is built into our human DNA whether we know it or not. In 1793, France decided to de-Christianize the calendar. They adopted a ten-day work week to increase productivity. The result? Suicides skyrocketed, production dropped and people were burned out. (Swoboda 11) On the other hand, Seventh-Day Adventists...who strictly observe a weekly Sabbath...live ten years longer than the average person. Hmmm... when you add up the number of Sabbaths that an Adventist keeps over their life time, guess how many there are? About ten-years' worth!

In other words, the seven-day rhythm is built into us...by God! We ignore it at our peril. And boy...are we ignoring it. There is nothing sacred about the Sabbath, even to Christians. We work, play, shop, consume and worry on the seventh day in the same way we do every other day. We are, most of us, flagrantly violating one of the Ten Commandments... and like I said, not only do we not give it a second thought, we consider that extra day of work virtuous.

Which brings us back to this present moment. For the first time since I was a child, we are experiencing an enforced Sabbath upon our lives. Restaurants closed. Stores closed. Sporting events cancelled. Sheltering in home with families. Home schooling. Looking for ways to keep children entertained and marriages healthy. Every single day. It almost feels like God is inviting us to make up for decades of ignoring what he intended as one of his greatest gifts to us: Sabbath. The invitation to "stop" ...and to "delight."

I know that for many of you, the longer this quarantine drags on, the less restful and delightful it feels. But I invite you to look at this from a different perspective. If you were told that you had one month left to live...how would you want to spend those 30 days? Would you want one more big work assignment? To close one more big deal? Go on a massive shopping spree? Or a drunken binge? For MOST of us...if we had 30 days left...we would want to surround ourselves

with our family, wouldn't we? To spend every moment drinking in each other's love. Asking deep questions. Speaking deep affection. Laughing, playing, eating, praying, crying, remembering, dreaming and promising. Isn't that what most of us would do?

In other words...it might look very much like what every one of us is being forced to do presently. So, is there a way we can view this lock-down as a gift and not an imposition? Is there a way we can allow this enforced solitude to reshape our habits and our hearts and regain the life-giving gift of Sabbath for ourselves and our families?

John Mark Comer has written a very good and very troubling book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. In it, he describes what he calls our "pathological busyness" and "cancerous restlessness." We are so addicted to our plugged-in, multi-tasking frenzy that we find it impossible to quiet ourselves, even occasionally. Shabbat means "stop" and "delight." Are there things we could practice stopping right now so that we might delight in other things...in better things? So here are a few ideas:

Stop neglecting your time with God...and delight in getting to know him. The devil uses the frenetic nature of our everyday life to convince us that we don't have the time to pray...that we don't have the time to read the Bible. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "If the Devil can't make us bad, he will make us busy." Perhaps this quieter season frees up some of your busy time to meet with God daily. Read the gospel of Luke along with Megan and Larry. Memorize Philippians 4. Pray for people who are suffering or without work. Why not begin a rhythm of study and prayer that will delight your heavenly father... delight you...and could change your life!

Stop taking your spouse for granted...and delight in the gift that they are. I like my wife. A lot. I really enjoy being with her. And still, it is easy for me to take this remarkable woman for granted. But being with her 24/7 has been an opportunity for me to enjoy her quiet presence, to have good conversations, to take walks and cook and clean together. She is making a lot of bread and I am getting fatter enjoying it. We are learning Portuguese so that we can communicate with our new Brazilian daughter-in-law. (I hope you saw my blog telling you that Cooper and Deb got married last week? Surprise!). Because Cyndi is my best friend, I am finding this extended time with her to be a gift...and delighting in it.

And... if you don't like your spouse very much right now...could this enforced togetherness be a chance for you to start over? To not hide from each other? To say one kind thing every day? To do one act of love every day? To sleep an extra hour and cuddle? To learn to be the first to forgive? To rediscover the things you once enjoyed about each other? Take a new delight in your spouse.

And by the way, if you are a single person, could I just say, I really feel for you. I can't imagine what it's like to be alone in this time. Maybe even bored out of your mind. Maybe this is an opportunity for you to reach out to every family member and friend that you haven't spoken to for a while. But I do pray that the Lord will protect you from loneliness during this season of isolation.

Stop bingeing on electronics...and delight in what is right around you. I'll say it again. Turn the TV off! Especially cable news. All of them are twisters-of-the-truth for the purpose of selling their products. They profit from your gullibility! They are fanning a concerning health issue into a hysterical wildfire. Take away their power. Turn them off.

And Stop being at the mercy of your smartphone. In his book, Comer writes that the average iPhone user touches their phone 2,617 times a day spending, on average, 2 ½ hours on the device. And because we have the knowledge of the whole world at our fingertips, our memories are growing worse and our attention span is dropping. In the year 2000, the average attention span was twelve seconds. Today the average human attention span is eight seconds. To put that in perspective, the attention span of a goldfish is nine seconds. Yes, we are more distracted than a goldfish. (Comer, p. 36; 39; 72) We have become addicted. And if you don't believe it, prove it! Turn your phone off for 24 hours. Don't keep your phone by your bed. Don't check it first thing in the morning. Don't look at it until you've had your devotions.

Now to those of you with little ones at home, I would say this: Take delight in discovering what Sabbath could mean to your family. I realize that unlike Empty-Nesters, your days are not exactly quiet! You are cooking more, you can't go to the park, you can't bring in a sitter. You are trying to come up with creative ways to keep kids occupied and are going a little crazy doing it. So the idea that every day could be a taste of Sabbath might seem like a complete joke to you. So how about this: can you take ONE day of Sabbath a week? You know, like God commanded?

With sports gone, school gone, shopping gone, businesses gone... could this provide you enough margin to explore what one day of "Stopping" might look like? Create new Sabbath patterns. Stop making your beds for that day. Stop washing dishes for that day; let them pile up. Ask each person what is life-giving for them...and do that together. Make Jell-o and squish it in your hands. Go for a hike. Start a tradition of Swedish pancakes for Sabbath breakfast. Or maybe this is a day...brace yourself...when NO ONE, including kids, has screen time. I know, unthinkable. But you do recall that 20 years ago, there was no such THING as screen time? Somehow, kids without devices in their hands grew up without too much emotional scarring!

And especially...Delight in worshipping together, even from afar. Here's a picture of the Davidsons doing that last week...all of them receiving the benediction.

Let me close with one last thought. Jesus was constantly attacked by the religious leaders because he didn't keep the Sabbath in the legalistic way they required. In fact, he shocked them all when he said that HE was Lord of the Sabbath. And in Hebrews 4, Jesus is described as our "Sabbath Rest." In other words, as believers in Jesus, our Sabbath keeping is no longer JUST about obeying a commandment...although it never stopped being a commandment. It means that now that the Spirit of Christ lives in us, we have the freedom and power to experience what TRUE Sabbath rest really is. Not rule-keeping... but deep, restful and delightful relationship with God and with each other. Maybe this will be a season in which we discover that.