

**“Sabbath and Beyond”**  
**Lewinsville Presbyterian Church**  
**August 20, 2023**  
**Luke 6:6-16**  
**Rev. Jen Dunfee**

This is the final sermon on Sabbath of our summer series, and I am sad to see it end. Partly because it so strongly coincides with school resuming tomorrow, and the end of summer in our house, but mostly because of how much this series has stretched and grown my understanding of Sabbath. And the series is ending when I still have a ways to go and grow in the practice of Sabbath. I am with all of you who have shared with me or Pastor Layne that this theme is challenging, because of *this in here* and *this* in our world and the DMV area, because of, frankly, *this* (phone). Our culture is not sabbath oriented and Sabbath practice feels like swimming against not just a stream, but a fire hose.

Pastor Layne has shared some of her experiences of sabbath this summer; here's one since I've last been in worship. We got Covid, so we took a shortened visit to an island in Maine, ending up with only three days there. During those three days, along with all of our daily activities, I completed a 1,000 piece puzzle and read a 400 page book. That was some aggressive Sabbathing!

(While we are talking about puzzles, I would like to take a moment to apologize for the experience of the puzzle in St. Andrews Hall. I bought that puzzle because it says “The Lord is my Strength” which is great. But if I had read the Amazon reviews of the puzzle, I would have noticed the top one, “Pieces are not cut well and there are multiple pieces fitting in multiple places. Never had more trouble with a puzzle.” Or perhaps this one, “I do puzzles often. This puzzle is impossible. The pieces have little originality and many pieces fit in more than 1 place. I threw it away after getting half of it done.” So to everyone who experienced the opposite of Sabbath, perhaps some weeping and gnashing of teeth in St. Andrews Hall, all because I didn't read the reviews, your pastor asks for your forgiveness. (note - after the sermon several people said I missed the opportunity to make a joke, that “The Lord is my Strength” is the mantra needed for this puzzle!))

But maybe there is something in that bad puzzle experience that fits our exploration this summer.

Not everything we try as a spiritual practice, perhaps particularly when it comes to Sabbath, works. The post-it notes on the board in the narthex show the great variety in what gives us rest and renewal. And I can make fun of myself for my over-achieving reading and puzzling, but I liked the mental worlds both of those activities gave me entry to, and I have

learned I don't always best counter my fast-paced habits by quiet contemplation. And I know that because I have tried and tried again. Not everything works.

But the good news is there are lots of Sabbath possibility in scripture, and there is something we can take *beyond* this sermon series from each of the preceding weeks, to help us figure out how we Sabbath, what practices align with what we have learned about Sabbath thus far:

It's 1. about connecting with the created order of goodness and rest,  
and 2. abiding in God, in God's heart, and connecting with each other on behalf of the world,  
and 3. remembering the Lord's saving and orienting our lives around it,  
and 4. seeking justice for those who literally cannot stop without the floor falling out below them,  
and 5. realigning and reorienting ourselves to God in worship and in prayer,  
and 6. relying on God instead of forcing our purpose by allowing joy, contemplation and gratitude to replace worry, fears and anxiety  
and 7. opening up space to find moments of connection with God in an immersive, eternal and whole state of mind  
and 8. making it more than something we do when we get around to it, but the goal of everyday, as residents in Christ's kingdom.

And then there is today, week 9. From Luke 6, which begins with Luke's version of Pastor Layne's scripture from last Sunday, Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. The "Sabbath controversy" began last week now continues with a healing on the Sabbath. I am struck in this passage by how self-conscious everyone is about what is transpiring. How aware everyone is that this is the Sabbath, and something is about to go down. The Pharisees whispering and waiting, ready to accuse at any wrong step. The anticipation of the crowd, turning their heads from the Pharisees to the man, to Jesus. The man, there in the synagogue, maybe because he heard Jesus is in town, off to the side, wanting Jesus to notice him, but aware of the watching Pharisees. And Jesus, our beloved savior, knows and sees it all. And then does a Sabbath action that would pass the test of not just any, or a few, but all of the criteria of weeks 1-8 of our sermon series that I just listed: "connecting with goodness, abiding in God, the Lord's saving, seeking justice, reorienting to God, relying on God over fear, opening an immersive God space, making it about being residents in God's kingdom."

The Sabbath controversy scriptures, last week's, this one, remind us that there is risk, and possible loss of status or acceptance in aligning our lives around sabbath practice, and the possibility of conflict. In general people don't like suggestions that they are living their lives wrong in some way – wrong purpose, wrong direction, wrong priorities. And Sabbath living, as we have defined it this summer, is by its nature counter to the powerful forces of our time, and our culture. Not that we Christians overtly go around saying "you're doing it wrong" but our trying to life differently on a Sabbath pattern and pace, threatens the accepted "way things

work.” And that’s even in small things, imagine what would be threatened if we suggested a 49-year jubilee and forgiveness of debts!

It’s like in the teen movie where a girl decides she doesn’t want to be part of the high-status friend group, and leaves for a group that, in the world of the movie, is less cool or popular. This usually ends up threatening the validity of the status of the first group, who make it difficult for her to just to walk away with pressure tactics from cajoling to bullying, and if those don’t work, then maligning and gossiping. A teen movie version of swimming against a fire hose. Sabbath living pushes against the forces of fast pace, competitive, status-oriented, *I get what’s mine regardless of what that means-for-you culture*, that things harm our mental health, our community fabric, and our country’s commitment to justice. Pastor Layne preached last week that Jesus doesn’t just counter these forces, but opens a door to a world not built on them. Jesus’ desire is to make everyday a sabbath day, because that is what we will experience in his ultimate kingdom, and what we experience now every time we connect with that realm.

From week 8 and now 9, we see that Sabbath possibilities through Christ, following Jesus in abundant life and self-giving goodness for others, are available now. We can pattern our lives on connecting and reconnecting and trying to stay as connected as we can to the experience of Christ’s kingdom in our earthly lives, beginning with the doorway here in this beloved community we are building together as Lewinsville Presbyterian. Knowing now it is only partial, not full yet, but one day we will live it fully.

It is a beautiful vision and I think why this sermon series has connected so strongly with me, and with Pastor Layne and Lizzie Steele and many of you. We are looking for rest, not just vacation, but spiritual rest, and that is what God gives. What we find only in God’s heart. “Our hearts, created restless until they find rest in God” as St. Augustine said. Every attempt at Sabbath practice, connecting us with the kingdom that the Lord of the Sabbath designed for us, gives us a glimpse. We began this series in the creation of the cosmos, we end it in the eternal kingdom.

And it is beautiful. And life giving. And for each of us but not for us alone. And worth the risk. And it puts things right, the things that we know aren’t right, the things we don’t even know how to step outside and resist. Where the bad puzzles are completed. And where we meet Jesus. The kingdom that is to come, a place waiting for us, dim for us now, but one day we will see so clearly, the kingdom of the Sabbath, 9 possibilities and beyond. Thanks be to God.