

Date: February 14, 2010

Title: Resting as We Run the Race

Scripture: Ex 20:8-11; Philippians 3:12-14

Exodus 20:8-11 (NLT) ⁸ "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; then he rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NLT) ¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.

I have shared with you two passages of scripture today. The first is one taken from that familiar passage of scripture known as the Ten Commandments. This is where Moses brings ten of the most important instructions to us from Mount Sinai. The third instruction seems pretty simple. Basically it just says that we are to “*Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*” This seems like it shouldn’t be too hard to remember. Once a week you take one day of rest (*Observe the Sabbath*) and while you are resting you think about God. (*Keep it holy*) This seems pretty simple to follow doesn’t it?

And then the passage goes on to further explain, “*On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.*” I think this part was put in there as a way of making sure that the people realized that this holy day of rest is really for everyone, not just for the wealthy or the powerful. I think this makes sense because how would it be if a rich person took his or her day of rest, but the servants had to keep working? I think God just wanted to make sure that people would know that the Sabbath is for everyone, rich and poor alike.

But let me ask you this? Do any of you other than me find it challenging to remember to take one day to rest and think about God? I take a day off, but I’m not always so good about resting the whole day or thinking about God the whole day.

I think I have at least one reason why this is so difficult for me and perhaps for you. Realistically, the reason I think it is so tough is because I have pretty much absorbed the culture of USofA into my psyche. What I mean by this is that the culture around me has become so appealing and is so ever-

present that I cannot really distinguish myself from the prevailing culture of our time. Now, I wouldn't say that this is in all things and I don't want you to get the idea that I think everything about our culture is bad. That would just not be true.

No.....all I am saying is that more often than not, I seem to care more about the things of the world, than I do about the things of God when what I really want is for the things of God to be the most important things in my life.

One way I think we might be able to understand this is like this: It is as if we are all running a race. Our lives are like a race. Every person joins the race when they are born and they run the race their entire lives. But you know how when you run a race there is usually a finish line and the finish line represents achieving a goal of some kind. Well, in this case, the goal is something we get to choose. We can choose the goal represented on that bumper-sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." That is one race we can run. Or, we can choose the goal of the nicest house in the neighborhood, a lot of personal power, a lot of money, traveling to distant parts of the world, doing the most good you can do, or any number of things you can think of.

As we run this race, our goals can shift from one thing to another as we either decide that the goal is unachievable or not as desirable as we once thought. There is nothing wrong with this as long as we are aware of the shift and we are consciously choosing to make the change.

But too often what happens is that while we are running the race we make a slight shift, and begin running a different race and we aren't even conscious of the shift. Or we can be running a race focused in on a goal

that seems perfectly fine, but it really is at cross purposes with the race we really desire to run.

Without a doubt,

- The race I want to run is the race that draws me closer to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- The race I want to run will put me in line with all that my creator, God had in mind for me from the beginning.
- The race I want to run is directed by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The problem I face, then, is that too often I think I am running this race – call it God’s race – but when I hold up my life and look at it next to the instructions God gives each of us, I find that I’m running a different race than the one I thought.

Somehow, in the intensity of the race, I find that I have begun to chase after the wrong things. It is particularly easy to get sidetracked in this way when you are running the race with people you love and admire. It’s particularly easy to get sidetracked when you are running the race with people who are loved and admired by millions of others and you want to fit in. There is a natural human tendency to want to associate with and imitate people for whom you have admiration and respect. We all want to do that, but while we are doing this, we need to keep our wits about us and make sure we are making decisions that will move us along in the race for which we were actually created... God’s race.

When it comes to God’s race, what I am realizing is that while I am running the race doing more, more, more, in fact, there are some very important and scheduled stops that are a critical part of God’s race. If I don’t take

those scheduled stops – if I just keep going, going, going, I will be considerably less effective in God's race. God gave us those scheduled stops for a reason and if we ignore them, we do so at our own peril. Doing more, more, more is fine for six days, but on the seventh day we are to rest and think about God.

When we rest we give our bodies and our minds a chance to refuel and rejuvenate. When we keep it holy by thinking about God we have a chance to evaluate if we are really running God's race or running somebody else's race.

- We can check this in our scriptures, ***if we take the time to read them.***
- We can ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit, ***if we take the time to pray.***
- We can readjust our priorities ***if we take the time to notice how we are really living.***

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God said, *I gave them my Sabbath days of rest as a sign between them and me. It was to remind them that I, the LORD had set them apart to be holy, making them my special people.*
Ezekiel 20:12 (NLT)

We are meant to be a people set apart to be in relationship with God and with each other. When it is nearly impossible to distinguish the Christians from everyone else in the world, we know that we might have a problem. It's not as though God is going to wipe us off the face of the earth for our lack of faith. God is a loving and merciful God. And I believe that God will never abandon us nor will God forsake us, but when we abandon and

forsake God because we are so distracted by the things of this world, we are running a different race from God's race. When we run a race that is different from God's race, we achieve results that are different from God's results.

In this church, more than anything else, I hope and pray that we will achieve God's results. I believe that this is why we are here. And because we want to achieve God's results we are going to take some time to focus on God's race during this upcoming Lenten season. Let me ask you, were any of you surprised by the shofar on the phone tree message? If you don't want to receive that message just let us know – otherwise we will be sending out the message every Saturday afternoon as a way to help each of us to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy. Starting today for each of the Sundays of Lent we are going to extend our practice of keeping the Sabbath from something we do for an hour or two on Sunday Morning to something we do all day. We will begin by welcoming in the Sabbath on Saturday evenings with the special phone message most of you received yesterday. Unless you ask us **not** to call you, our automatic phone calling machine will call you with a message and a prayer to help you remember to keep the Sabbath. If you didn't receive the message and you want to please talk with me after the service.

Then on Sunday afternoons we will be gathering together for an informal time to rest, to pray, and to think about God. We are calling this Sabbath until Sunset. We will begin a couple of hours before the sun officially sets for prayer, reading stories to each other, singing hymns, taking a walk with family or friends or just sitting and talking about what God is doing in our lives or in our church. We will share a meal together consisting of food we have prepared ahead of time so there is not a lot of work involved cooking

it. Until Daylight Savings Time starts, we will begin at 4:pm and stay about an hour and forty five minutes until the sun goes down. After Daylight Savings Time, we will start at five.

I'm not sure exactly what this will look like or what it will turn into, but my hope is that it will be a time for us as a church to take God's scheduled rest stops in a more intentional way and that as a result of taking this time, we will become better disciples of Christ.

You don't have to come, of course, but my hope is that you wouldn't pass this up to do some errand or get some job done that you need to do over the weekend. My hope is that the only reason you wouldn't join us here is because you were involved in a much better way of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. And of course, I know that some of you work at jobs that don't recognize the Sabbath and I can't expect you to leave your job to come to church.

God gave us the Sabbath as a sign to remind us that we have been set apart to be a holy and a special people. If we are going to be effective as a church for God, we must draw our strength from God. We are all in a race, you know. We are all in God's race if we want to be. Paul says, "*I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.*" It's a worthy race to be a part of for sure... but we do need to rest. It's on God's schedule... I do hope you will put it on your schedule. AMEN.