

Gerti Reagan Garner
Sermon
June 2, 2024
Pentecost 2 – B

The world is always changing. The changes begin in small ways, then pick up momentum.

I remember that when I was a child that Sundays were special. We went to church, then visited with friends or took a drive. I especially remember that when we still lived in the city of Los Angeles we sometimes went to Exposition Park in Los Angeles for leisurely walks. Usually those walks included the Rose Garden, which was always beautiful. Then there would be a nice dinner. Even when we moved away to so my parents could run a chicken ranch, we often went to Los Angeles on Sundays or friends would come visit us. What I don't remember is when things changed. I can't remember when life got so full that Sunday outings became an exception rather than the norm. I know it didn't happen when I was still a child and probably not even during my first decade or two as an adult.

Weekends used to be different. Most stores had short hours on Saturdays and were closed on Sundays. Many restaurants were closed. But we have come a long way from there. In the latter half of the 20th century as the news cycle expanded from morning news and evening news to a 24-hour news cycle. Stores and restaurants are open seven days a week; we can shop 24 hours a day if we want to shop online. Now that women in the work force is the norm rather than the exception, there are more chores to do on Saturdays and Sundays. In many ways, we've lost weekends.

In less than 50 years home computers have become almost universal. That change has also fueled the smart phone industry. These changes have had made some parts of life so much easier than it used to be. And it has spurred other changes that overall are not so wonderful.

Then there is multi-tasking. I remember when people boasted about their multi-tasking abilities. I admit to having been a multi-tasker. Even now, when I consider myself as having "given that up," I actually still multi-task, particularly when it comes to exercise and driving – I almost always have an audiobook on when I'm doing those activities.

These things are not bad in themselves; it is the potential for us to become unaware of what we are doing. Busy-ness is so intrinsic in our society, we don't even always recognize what we are doing. If you are reading any wellness material these days, you have probably seen articles about how the constant productivity is harmful to us.

Deuteronomy says: Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

God liberated the people! That liberation should still be ours. To what are we enslaved?

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt about 1300 years before Jesus was born. In that time, the rule-makers managed to transform God's liberation of the people's enslavement into a strict rule with 39 specific prohibited activities

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on the Sabbath. To all of this we have Jesus's answer, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath. . ."

We know that the commandment is to observe and keep holy the sabbath. How is it made for us? Jesus's statement is easier to understand when we recognize that the Sabbath has roots in the Genesis creation story. At the end of each day of creation, God stepped back and looked at what had been brought forth and called it good. On the seventh day, God rested. God blessed the day and called it holy.

We do not need to show our worth by producing all the time. We are called to live a sabbath life. Going to church is not keeping the sabbath. Observing sabbath is not about going to church and praising God.

It is about giving ourselves to God in the spaciousness of time and rest. A time to notice the gifts God has given us; nurturing our bodies through rest and movement; allowing our minds to let go of the planning and figuring out what is ours to do next . . .and instead let our minds be quiet or wander somewhere **delicious**.

A time to play; a time to walk on the beach or the hills; a time to see something new; **a time to do anything that makes us grateful for being alive.**

There is evidence that truly keeping the Sabbath is hard for many people – we don't know how not to be BUSY! In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor calls the path to Sabbath, *The Practice of Saying No*. She encourages us to start where we can if we can't be still and not producing for a whole day. "Decide you will get up an hour before everyone else in the house and dedicate that hour to doing nothing but being in the divine presence. Decide that you will turn off the television an hour before going to bed and spend that time outside looking at the sky. You could resolve not to add anything more to your calendar without subtracting something from it. You could practice praising yourself for saying no as lavishly as you do when you say yes."

Sabbath is universal. We need to see everything in the world - people, animals, plants, the earth – as an interconnected entirety; an interconnected whole. We need to see the world as one – **interbeing**. In a recent conversation with an eco-spiritual teacher I was introduced to the subject of reciprocity between humans and nature. As teacher said, whenever humans engage in bad behavior toward nature, it fights back and nature will win.

We are experiencing climate change. Of course, we are aware of that and the efforts to heal the ecosystem, but what happens when we think about climate change through the lens of terms like "human and nature reciprocity" or "interbeing." Until very recently I had no idea that there are scientists researching these topics.

Leviticus supports the call to extending sabbath to care for the whole earth:

For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do

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not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary residents who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

We are called to balance the cultural and technological movements of society with the way of life God wants for us. The way of life that Jesus showed us in his life on earth.

Barbara Brown Taylor beautifully summarizes the fruits of observing sabbath: When you live in God, your day begins when you lose yourself long enough for God to find you, and when God finds you, to lose yourself in praise.

May it be so.