

We have spent our Lenten season focusing on the spiritual practice of keeping sabbath, one day in seven to be non-productive, resting, joyful. We are invited to take a sabbath day each week because it is a commandment and it is a commandment because our sacred story tells us that God did it first. After creating the world in six "days" – a day in this sense not a 24-hour period so much as an era or an epoch – our creation story tells us that God rested. *On the seventh day God had finished the work God had been doing; so on the seventh day God rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

Now, was creating the world "work" for our generative God whose nature is to create? Or does a being of infinite energy needs "rest?" Perhaps God wanted to set a pattern for us who do need rest. We are told that every point in the creation process God stopped and observed what God had made and found it good. And after the sixth day, *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.* When we stop for a day, and savor what we have produced, we are better able to claim it and celebrate it, even in the midst of pain and stress.

That sabbath after hard work became the pattern for God's people ever after. That Sabbath after hard work also became a pattern that Jesus followed. Arrested on Thursday night, condemned and executed on Friday, he was laid in the tomb, his body at rest. Saturday was a sabbath day, and so his followers could not properly anoint and dress his body for burial; everyone had to stop. It's hard to imagine what they went through, having to be still and undistracted from the feelings of grief, rage, trauma, bewilderment that must have coursed through them. Sabbath rest is also good for getting in touch with our feelings. But they were obedient, not coming out to the garden tomb until the darkness of the new day had begun after sundown. Then they got up and came, with their spices and cloths. And found that Jesus too, had got up and gone, leaving his shroud neatly folded.

Just as God the Creator rested after creating the world,
so God the Redeemer rested after ushering in the new world,
the new Jerusalem, the new realm of God in which the power of sin and evil
has been broken, which death will never again have the last word.
Jesus' was the ultimate sabbath, the sabbath in which all things were made whole.

Now, if you're like me, you look around and say, "I see a lot of broken,
not a lot of whole." Even those women, finding his tomb empty,
couldn't believe that he might have risen from the dead.
It took not one but two angels to announce this Good News to them,
"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.
And then, speaking to their disbelief:

*"Remember? Remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be
handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."*
Remember how he told you – God doesn't ask us to believe in a vacuum.
God tells us what God is going to do, and God does it, and then we rejoice.

When they ran to tell the men what they had heard and seen,
they were dismissed – "an idle tale," their Good News was called. That's what
much of the world thinks of our Good News; an idle tale, signifying nothing.
But that story was enough to get the men to check it out for themselves.
And then they had their own story to tell, which they did all over the known world.
Our first reading today shows us Peter telling that story to a bunch of
Roman soldiers gathered at a centurion's home – soldiers upon whom the
Holy spirit would come in power right in the middle of Peter's sermon!
This Good News has power beyond us if we let the Spirit speak through us.

And that may be the most important lesson for us from Jesus' Sabbath rest –
That the most profound and important things are not accomplished
by our working harder but by our resting more and trusting God.
See, we don't rest only because we're tired by what we have done.
We also rest for what's ahead so that we can meet it with our best energy,
our most capacity for listening and collaborating with least stress.
God still knew there was plenty of work to be done after the creation of the world.
Jesus knew he had a lot to do after he walked out of that tomb –
meet his followers here, there and everywhere,
and continue to train them, teach those lessons again.

Easter is not an end – not a culmination so much as a continuation of Lent, of life. It is a hinge point between the old way of living and the new life we live in Christ, how we live when we realize that life is forever, that nothing will be able to separate us from the overwhelming love of God.

We have work to do, my friends.

This community has work to do, living into a new future with new leadership.

This community has work to do, engaging the neighbors around us and sharing with them our story of love that will not quit, no matter what happens.

But this “work” is better done when we rest regularly, and trust all the time.

It is not “work” we do alone – just as Jesus kept showing up for fifty days in his disciples’ life, now, through the Holy Spirit, he shows up in our lives all the time.

He shows up in our hearts and minds as we make space for him.

Next Sunday Elizabeth will be baptized – and like all who have been baptized, her merely human self will die in that water,

and she will rise a new creation, Elizabeth plus Jesus, forever.

And so we rise. With him, we rise. We rise to meet the forces of darkness that oppress and harm God’s precious children.

We rise to work for justice and equity for all God’s precious people.

We rise to work for peace in the face of aggression and brutality.

We rise to heal the sick and welcome the stranger and forgive the unforgivable.

We rise fueled with resurrection power.

What is resurrection power? It is the power that comes from knowing that this life is not all there is, that we have a glorious future ahead of us now and after we join Jesus around the throne of God.

Jesus continues to join us here as we work to see God’s realm realized in this life and then go on to enjoy it in life to come.

Until that day, like him, we rest, and we rise.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Amen.

Acts 10:35-43

Peter began to speak to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all.

That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.