

## “Sabbath: Rest”

1 Kings 19:1 – 15a, Galatians 3:23-29 & Luke 8:26-39

Pastor Maggie Breen

June 22, 2025

The church has a calendar that follows this rhythm between what we call ordinary time and extraordinary time. There are two extraordinary seasons. The first one runs from the end of November until mid - January during which time we celebrate Advent and Christmas, and then the second runs for about 15 weeks in the spring when we celebrate Lent and Easter. The rest of the year is ordinary time.

The extraordinary seasons help us remember the center of who we are by recalling and celebrating the “extraordinary” events in God’s relationship with us through Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus’s incarnation and birth amongst us, his crucifixion and resurrection, and then his empowering of his followers with the Spirit. The rest of the time – the ordinary time – is about living the life these events call us to. Green is the liturgical color for ordinary times, and it symbolizes the growth that happens in the ordinary.

Today we are shifting away from the extraordinary Easter season and back into ordinary time. And we drop, today, as we pick up the lectionary assigned to ordinary time, we drop into this story from 1st Kings. The word that I believe we need to hear from this story, a word that speaks to our current time and place, is the reminder this story gives us of a central command of God on God’s people – a command we need to help us move through the ordinary time – and that is the command to sabbath.

During the ordinary time of this summer, on the Sundays I am preaching, I will be working with a book by Wayne Muller called “Sabbath: Finding rest, renewal and delight in our busy lives”. Now this command to rest might feel counter intuitive, it might engender in us some misplaced guilt. How can we rest, how can we step back in what really feels like extraordinary times in our world. Times when there is so much to worry about, so much to attend to: so much tension and distrust, so much violence and fear, so much scarcity and exclusion, so much that feels urgent and precarious. But the thing is beloved, unless we obey the command to sabbath we will not, we cannot, be about God’s way especially when it gets hard.

God knows that Elijah needs rest, and God knows that only after he takes this rest will be able to hear God clearly again, and able to move forward in the way God

calls him. As I said before, we are dropping in part way through Elijah's story and the back story to the episode we read today is really important to our understanding.

Elijah has been called to stand up to a king in a long line of kings. These kings have given themselves to other gods and have abandoned the way of Yahweh – the God of the Hebrew people. A way that is about humility and reliance on God, a way that is about care of the people and the land with particular attention to the vulnerable – the poor, the economically distressed, the immigrant.

These kings have due to their abandonment of God, split the kingdom and became embroiled in fighting over power and status. Elijah is called in a long line of prophets to call the king back.

But things are not going well for Elijah. God had instructed him to go and present himself to king Ahab after which God would send rain to break the drought so that Ahab would know that the rain is from God. In the process of this mission however Elijah, in his zealotry for the Lord, suggests a contest with Ahab where he is determined to show Ahab that his God is more powerful than the god Ahab is worshipping. He has Ahab and his wife Jezebel gather all their prophets – prophets of their false gods – and then he embarks upon a show of power to prove that his God is mightier.

His God is mightier, and the false prophets lose. But Elijah does not stop there – in his zealotry he rounds up the prophets – all 450 of them - and he slaughters them, going far beyond what God has commanded him to do. Now we join him fleeing and overwrought – facing the consequences of his action - and feeling alone, scared and exhausted.

God tends to him as he runs and it can be easy to presume that God's care of Elijah means that he somehow approves of his behavior, but I think this is a leap. There is nothing in the text to say this is so, and this supposition is perhaps a reflection of our own cultural norms that says that power means using force and might.

Rather I believe that the provision of rest that Elijah receives is a manifestation of God's relentless call on him and a reflection of God's mercy and grace. God sees and acknowledges that Elijah is scared and tired. He provides him with good gifts

in his exhaustion so that he has the strength and the space to hear again God's word to him again.

God then leads Elijah to a place where he can hear that God is not in the violence and the force and the noise. God is in the silence. And from this silence God calls Elijah back to work he has for him. Elijah can name what is true and find the courage to go where God tells him to go where he will be blessed with a companion in the work – someone who swears not to leave him and will carry on his work in the world.

Beloved if we are to remember who we are and who calls us; if we are to be able to look at what is true and follow God through it, we need to honor God's commandment to rest. Without rest we are liable to start believing that the liberation of the world relies on us and us alone. If we are going to last the journey, if we are going to follow our call to show up as a healing presence in spaces where the demons of oppression and exclusion and violence reign, we need to rest.

Muller in his book puts it like this:

"When we consecrate time to listen to the still small voices, we remember the root of inner wisdom that makes work fruitful. We remember from where we are most deeply nourished, and we see more clearly the shape (I would say the sacredness) of the people and things before us. Without rest, we respond from survival mode, where everything we meet assumes terrifying prominence."

Now our Christian pattern based on the story of our creation is that we set aside a day for rest. Muller acknowledges that sometimes this is more than we can do, but he wonders if we might make space for sabbath moments. A time to breath and remember that the world will keep turning and God will still be present offering you mercy and grace, whether or not you get the next task done. He suggests some practices that might help us take a sabbath moment.

- Light a candle to mark a moment to move a little slower and remember God's love for you.
- Choose a common act that you engage in every day – stopping at a stop light, grabbing a cup of coffee, opening your front door – when you engage these acts, let them be a reminder to stop and take 3 mindful breaths.

- Engage in blessings – when you see someone - your children, a friend, a stranger – offer a quiet prayer – maybe just one or two words of blessing.

I encourage you beloved of God to find rest. God wants us to rest even – or maybe especially if we feel we are unworthy or don't believe we need it. It is only as we make space for God to show up, it is only as we position ourselves to listen that we might know liberation from all that keeps us bound.