

Scriptures: Exodus 20:8-11

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Romans 1:16-25

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. ²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Proclamation of the Word

I am not sure if you are aware, but we have an interest group in the church called the Green Team. Beginning with a class on Christian understanding of caring for the creation and environment, some have kept the conversation going. Today they have prepared some information in your insert that will tell you what they have learned and want to share with you.

While every Sunday we celebrate God's goodness in creation and gather to praise God, today we take a closer look at what faith inspires and requires of us as stewards of creation. Some may think that talking about the environment and related climate issues is a political issue. It is. But for people of faith it has been and always is a faith issue. Creation care is a moral, spiritual, and religious issue, not a political football to be tossed about. Our call to worship was a retelling of creation and a reminder of God's pure delight and joy in creating all that is. As poet, farmer, and conservationist Wendell Berry writes,

God made the world because he wanted it made. God thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished his title to it. And He has never revoked the conditions, bearing

on His gift to us of the use of it, that oblige us to take excellent care of it. If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?'

When the words of Genesis were written on papyrus, the earth's population was about 50 million. Now we have 7 billion people living on this earth. The projection is that by 2050 we will number 9 billion peopleⁱⁱ. The realities have changed a bit since our ancestors sat around the fire retelling how God made the world.

As population increases as does the earth's temperature the most vulnerable suffer the most. The poor suffer from lack of clean water, diseases increase, and fighting of valuable resources leads to war. Vulnerable creatures suffer, too. Biologists predict that fully half of all species on earth may be gone within the next 50-100 years.ⁱⁱⁱ The whole created order is out of whack. Thomas Friedman calls this dramatic shift "Global Weirding" in his book *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. Why weird? Daffodils bloom in January now. The April Cherry blossom festival has been moved up to March. That's weird. Glacier National Park's 150 glaciers melted away to 27 in the last century.^{iv} That's more than weird. That is tragic.

Our faith teaches us that we are part of God's good creation. People do not live outside of nature, but as an integral part. While God's fingerprints are on everything made by Him, only humans are a mirror image, made in God's likeness on the 6th day. We know God is inventive, creative, life-giving, generous and benevolent. We are to be inventive, creative, life-giving, generous, and benevolent. We are to be God's stewards, protectors, care-takers. We are blessed to be a blessing. God speaks at the end of creation of blessing.

Genesis 1:28 "God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over. "

Sometimes we have taken that to extreme understanding that dominion means to dominate, decimate, destroy rather than preserve and protect. In the making of the world and all that lives in it, we are blessed. It is holy. That is how we are called to be- a reflection of God's image to the world. We are blessed to be a blessing.

The church through the ages has claimed that humankind was the crown of creation, the pinnacle, the masterpiece! Theologian Jurgen Moltmann argues that instead of humans being the crown of creation, we need to remember that it is the 7th day, the sabbath, when God rested that is the crown of creation. Sabbath is the crown of creation. In fact, today we read the 4th Commandment of the big 10 when God commands us to keep sabbath, to rest and worship. Moltmann writes, "Humans stand with all other earthly and heavenly beings in the same hymn of praise of God's glory, and in the enjoyment of God's sabbath pleasure over creation, as he saw that it was good. Even without human beings, the heavens declare the glory of God!"^v

God was so pleased and satisfied with what He had made that He just stopped and enjoyed it.

Sabbath is God's gift to us. It is one day in seven to not produce anything, to be. To be in God's presence. To be in God's creation. To be with God's people in worship. It is a day for joy and rest. Without it we are not living fully and in God's abundance. For Jews and 7th Day Adventists the

sabbath begins at sundown on Friday night and ends at sundown on Saturday. For many Jews it begins with the joy of a meal with family and friends. It is a day to refrain from work, driving, and production. Sounds restrictive to many of us, but it is intended as a day of freedom. When the Hebrew people were free from slavery, they practiced sabbath to show they belonged to God. They no longer belonged to Pharaoh. God had set them free!

A modern habit for sabbath might be no screens: no laptops or phones for work, no video games. This restriction could free you up to have more time to spend with people, taking a hike in the woods, appreciating God's best gifts. Without electronics, kids might just go outside and play.

For many Christians Sunday, the Lord's Day, our mini-Easter each week is a sabbath. For some of us Sunday is about going to worship/praising God, a good dinner, a day of real rest. "Remember the sabbath" begins the commandment. Remember...Remembering helps us feel whole. It re-memembers us. It puts us back together. We remember that God is God, and we are not. We are not in charge of the world, God is. We remember that we are creature and not Creator. We can let go, be unproductive, and trust God to be God. We need to be remembered because we are sinful and forget. Paul writes to the Romans about our sinful condition this way in Romans 1:25...

²⁵*because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...*

We have a tendency toward worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. That is called idolatry. We remember sabbath so we can praise God!

We usually think sabbath is for people, but sabbath is also a rest for animals and creation. Here is an example. So many of our fish populations are over-fished and being destroyed. Commercial fishing with trawlers the size of football fields are working hard to make money. When greed and overconsumption are at work seven days a week the impact is huge. Sharks, swordfish, tuna, and marlin have all but disappeared. Many other species are at risk, too. There is an economic impact. Cod fishing has always been a way of life in the Canadian province of Newfoundland, until 1992. The fishing factories had over harvested fish faster than they could reproduce. And in 1992 no fish were to be found. Forty thousand people lost their jobs because of over fishing.^{vi}

Sabbath is about protecting creation and the creatures that live on the earth because one day a week they get a rest from us humans!! Remember sabbath was also a day off for animals and servants. To protect the world God made, we have to make some serious changes in our way of life.

Rebekah Simon-Peter, environmental scientist and pastor, has a theory that sabbath is an environmentally friendly discipline. In talking with Jonathan Ormes, a retired NASA scientist, she made that assertion. His response:

"Absolutely. In fact, we can tell from space where and when people are observing sabbath all around the world."

"Really, from space," she asked.

He said, "We can see that levels of nitrous oxides- by products of fossil fuel combustion fluctuate during the week. They go down on Friday in Islamic countries; down on Saturday in Israel; and down on Sunday in the United States, Europe and Japan. Those levels don't go down at all in China; the numbers stay pretty steady throughout the week. This lowering of nitrous oxide levels is called the sabbath effect or the weekend effect."

The air quality improves from less driving and less industry. How about that? Spiritual practice and science converge. We are told to be stewards of creation. Science can measure how we are doing. When we take a sabbath, the earth can take a deep breath, a big deep breath. Have you ever thought about that?

In fact, the Hebrew word used in Exodus (Exodus 23:12; 31:17) for observing the Sabbath means "being refreshed." We translate sabbath literally as, "Paused for a breath." Sabbath is good for people and good for the earth. We can pause for breath. And with breathing problems and childhood asthma on the rise, we need to remember the sabbath.^{vii} Is that not amazing how interdependent we are on world? We are not separate from it. We are part of it. And we have the power to bless or curse.

God's covenant of blessing builds into creation a day of rest. God reminds us that we are prone to sin and idolatry worshiping greed, consumption, and even ourselves, the creature. We need to repent, turn to God who made us out of great love for the world. Through Christ we are new creations, called to be renewed and serve God's purposes. We are blessed with good gifts, and called to be a blessing.

Let's all take a deep breath and remember the sabbath, keeping it holy.

Scientific evidence shows that our very lives depend on it! And the lives of creatures and resources of God's good earth depend on it.

Laura Smith Conrad
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

ⁱ Wendell Berry, *What are people for?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 98.

ⁱⁱ "World Population to Reach 9.1 Billion in 2050 UN Projects," UN News Centre (February 24, 2005) as quoted by Rebekah Simon-Peter, *Green Church; Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice!* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 15.

ⁱⁱⁱ Simon-Peter, 16.

^{iv} IBID, 31.

^v Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation; A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 31.

^{vi} Simon-Peter, 33-34.

^{vii} IBID, 48-49.