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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

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Series: Big 10+

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 2:23-28

Message: “Remember and Keep Holy”

You would think that we as humans would be born knowing how to sleep. After all, it seems so natural, so necessary, like eating…but we have to learn how to do that too. But eating somehow seems to come easier than sleeping.

Sleeping is something we have to learn. Ask any parent of a newborn, or of a toddler, or of a teenager. Even as babies we don’t want to miss anything. As teenagers, night is a new territory, full of all sorts of adventure. As adults, sleep is what keeps us from taking care of our many responsibilities. At each new stage in life we have to learn how to go to sleep.

It’s even harder to go to sleep now than ever before, in our culture of 24/7 entertainment and expectations and energy drinks. Sleep isn’t fun. Sleep isn’t productive. We don’t want to miss out. And so we choose other things over sleep.

But as any parent of a child who hasn’t slept enough knows too clearly, we as humans need sleep. When we don’t, we crumble into a whiny, angry, unreasonable heap. Lack of sleep transforms us from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde.

We would like to think this just happens when we’re young, that we grow out of it, that as adults we can handle it—we don’t need that much sleep. We’re okay.

But the research is showing us more and more clearly that sleep is a critical component of our ability to thrive in life no matter how old we are.

These are just a few of the things that happen when we don’t get enough sleep on an ongoing basis:

1. We have more accidents.
2. We get dumber. We lose our capacity to concentrate, to problem solve, to remember things, to be creative, to assess our own judgement.
3. We’re at a higher risk of serious chronic health problems including all kinds of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and depression
4. Makes us less social, less friendly, and less hopeful
5. Makes us gain weight and age more quickly

With all this information, you’d think we would hear more about the importance of sleeping. It seems like we could solve some pretty significant problems in our culture if we just slept a little bit more.

Today’s commandment in our Big 10+ playbook tells us to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

Some of the reasons why we as humans tend to break this commandment are similar to why we don’t like to sleep. It seems inefficient, boring, we don’t want to say no and miss out on something. And yet what we find is that when we don’t’ take that Sabbath rest, the consequences are just as detrimental to us. We become bitter, hopeless, joyless, and desperate. But when we do take Sabbath rest, we are refreshed and find joy in life again, we are renewed in our relationship with God, and reenergized for life and work in the world.

Sabbath is a practice that goes back to the beginning of time, well before the 10 Commandments. It was one of the concerns that Moses voiced for the Israelites to Pharaoh. If nothing else, at least give us some time off to rest and worship God. Sabbath is unique in ancient times to the people of Israel—God’s chosen people.

Sabbath, or Shabbat in Hebrew, means stop, cease what you are doing. So this commandment says, remember to stop. Remember that you need to stop.

Why? Because we’re like God, made in the image of God, claimed by God’s grace. This means we’re children of royalty. And this is what royalty does.

God creates for six days. And then God chooses to rest. Why? Because God could. Not because God had to, but because God could. This is the difference between being royalty and being a slave. Royalty has the freedom and privilege to take time to enjoy life. Slaves have to work until they are worked to death. They can no choose to stop. They have no freedom to relax and enjoy.

In this commandment God claims us all as his royal children and gives us the freedom to relax and enjoy, to trust that things are taken care of. And of course, they are, by God’s very self.

So as we remember the Sabbath, we remember that the world is God’s, created by God, sustained by God. And we remember that we are free. Like God freed the Israelites from slavery, God through Jesus frees us from slavery to sin, death, and the never ending cares of this world. We remember that life is more than never ending work.

Joan Chittister describes spending the Sabbath or Shabbat in Jerusalem, something that was so much more than going to church on Sunday morning, but a time for everything and everyone to rest. And the rabbi explained why they practiced Sabbath. First, because there was no work, on this one day, everyone was equal, rich, poor, slaves, free alike. This is the way it is in God’s Kingdom. Second, it gave them time to reflect on the meaning of their lives. And third, it gave them time to reflect on the goodness of our work just as God did on the 7th day.

Sabbath is a gift from God. And so we remember to stop. We protect it, for it is such a special gift. And so we keep it holy. We don’t allow just anything or anyone to compromise that special time. We protect it.

You could think of it like date night with God. When you establish the practice of date night with your spouse or significant other, it is a special thing. But you have to protect it because there are so many things that will come up and try to take over that time. If you aren’t intentional, you end up spending the time doing errands and taking calls from work and family members and getting bogged down on the everyday dramas and worries of life.

But a good date night is one where you set work and chores and dramas aside and you enjoy and appreciate one another. When you get back home, all that stuff is there, but you deal with it better because you’ve taken that time away.

The Sabbath is like that. The commandment urges us to keep that date and make that time special, holy. Protect it from the ordinary tasks of life. Don’t forget God in the midst of it. Relax, reflect, enjoy what is good.

Some will always take Sabbath back to rules of what you can and can’t do. But Jesus, who practiced Sabbath regularly was clear about that. Man wasn’t made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for man. It’s not about the rules. It’s about the relationship.

Remember to stop and rest one day a week, to say no to work, to chores to the daily grind. And then keep it holy, say yes to God, do what makes that day a holy blessing.

I’ll finish with this beautiful description of Sabbath from Joan Chittister: Sabbath never ends in church. It only begins there. The goal is a Sabbath heart. To make room for God in your life, to put down today and live in the realm of the eternal brings us to realize the divine in the midst of the daily, to step into the arms of God and out of the tentacles of anything lesser.”

May we be those who remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.