6-23/24-18 Rev. Amy Haines

Ex 20:8-11, Mt 11:28-30 Rest Stop Ahead Road Signs Series

What comes to mind when you hear the words “road trip”? Do you smile with a favorite memory? Do you groan with the memory of a trip that resembled the Griswolds? Do you think about endless hours in the car? Or hear once again the question, “Are we there yet?”

There is something unique about a road trip, different from flying or riding a bus. Whether traveling by interstate or back roads, road trips allow one to see much more of our country—the purple mountains majesty or amber waves of grain, forests or swamps, small towns or urban centers.

Now some of you may be the type of traveler who gets in the car and goes—few stops, driving through the night, the trip a means of getting to your destination. Others of you may be the type of traveler who would rather not be rushed, who enjoys a good night’s sleep, and who is open to side trips. You view the journey as part of the adventure.

Last year, on our way home from St Louis, we made a side trip to Casey, Illinois to view 8 of the world’s largest items, including a rocking chair and gold tee. This year, however, we chose not to make a side trip to Gatlinburg or Chattanooga. The travel was too long for those adventures. We’ll save those towns for a future road trip.

No matter where your road trips have taken you, local or across country, and whether or not the trip was last month or years ago, think for a moment about the variety of road signs you see along the way.

Merge. Steep Grade Ahead. Road Work Ahead. Road Closed. Stop. One Way. No U-turn.

Dead End. Right lane exit only. Speed limit 70. Rest Area 1 Mile.

We even saw a sign last week that said, “Warning: Beware of Venomous Snakes”!

Although I have a pretty good sense of direction, road signs assist me in getting to where I need to be and not accidentally taking a detour. My grandfather was famous in the family for his detours, for he constantly tried to get to places by memory, and didn’t always end up where he expected to be. I relied on google maps last week to get us from our resort house to each Disney park, even though Disney road signs were plentiful and helpful. I only missed one turn that came up too quickly.

This summer in worship, as we ponder road signs found in God’s Word, the Bible, I must confess that I chose our first road sign for a specific reason—it is my favorite sign to see while traveling. “Rest Stop Ahead” Or as they often now read “Rest Area 1 Mile”

On our road trip to and from Florida, we stopped at many rest areas, but not all of them. I also learned that Google maps will not only list state rest areas, but will also list the travel plaza/truck stops, such as Pilot or Flying J or Love’s.

For personal hygiene reasons, or simply to get out and stretch, I don’t mind a quick walk around a rest area. They force us to stop. To rest for a moment. To check on where we are and where we are going. To grab a quick drink or snack. To stretch tired backs and legs. Rest stops are like a comma, a pause, a breath on our travels.

When was the last time you stopped to take a breath on this journey we call life, or on this path we call discipleship? When was the last time you intentionally rested?

The demands of life can pull us in many different directions. Earning a living. Fulfilling a vocation. Nurturing relationships. Caring for family members. Transporting kids. Attending kids’ concerts, games and activities. Exercising. Eating healthy. Cleaning house. Caring for self. Keeping up appearances. Sleep. Worship. Service. Participation in church and community.

Sometimes we cry out, stop the world and let me catch up! Or cry out, there is never enough time or money or energy or assistance to let us rest!

When we become overwhelmed by the needs of our lives and this world, when we are running full tilt for days and weeks and months on end, when we feel there is never enough, God looks at us and says, “Stop. Rest. Reflect. Just Be.”

Clergy are notorious for either not taking time to rest, or abusing time off. We either trust God to do it all, or think we have to do everything ourselves. Annual Conference this year finally approved a comprehensive vacation policy that also includes encouragement for regular days off as well as Sabbath rest. Yes, I know clergy who have tried to take all of their vacation days on Sunday, and I know clergy who haven’t taken a vacation day in years. Neither one is helpful to ministry or family. And burnt out clergy cannot lead churches effectively. We need to be rested to be open to God’s creativity on where to go next.

I didn’t realize how much I really needed a vacation until we were on the drive to Florida. I take my vacation as a gift to my family. What I struggle with is taking a full day off, let alone a day for Sabbath. While I may be out of the office on Fridays, often I am working on my sermon.

Procrastination has always been my downfall. So I am preaching as much to myself today as to you.

God calls us all to rest, yet we all rest in different ways. Some need to be with others, in planned or unplanned ways. Some need time alone, reading or napping or simply sitting on the beach. Sometimes we need to be off the grid, away from cell phones and email and Facebook.

I actually stayed away from email and rarely checked Facebook on this vacation, which is unusual for me. I so appreciate that I can trust others here to keep our ministry running

and care for one another and powerfully preach the Word.

Today, we are called to pay attention to the road sign that says “Rest Stop Ahead”

and give ourselves permission to stop, to rest, to reflect, to just be.

One of my favorite contemporary Christian songs right now is called “Breathe” by Johnny Diaz.

When I get stressed, this song is one of my road signs to rest, breathe and be with God. I invite you now to pause and listen to this road sign. (video)

Today, our Scriptures are two of the more famous road signs in the Bible that call us to stop, to rest, and to reflect on who we are and where we are going.

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.”

The 10 Commandments were given by God to Moses for the newly freed people of Israel,

mandates for a way of life that honors God and honors neighbor. Our passage is known as Commandment #4, a call to a day of rest every seventh day. Sabbath keeping is not simply a day to stop all activity, but rather a day to pause, remember and give thanks for God in our lives.

The Sabbath is based on the history of creation, where God worked for six days then on the seventh day rested and gave thanks for all that had been created. The Sabbath also is a symbol of freedom following the Exodus. The Jews were to give thanks for their God-given freedom through rest, for slaves could not take time off to rest or even worship.

Whereas Jews celebrate Sabbath on Saturday, as the last day of creation, Christians celebrate Sunday as our holy day, as a mini-Easter celebration that gives thanks for Jesus’ resurrection.

So Sunday has become our Sabbath day, to rest and worship and give thanks to God.

Yet if we are honest, how many of us even think about Sunday as a Sabbath? How many of us strive to take any time off during the week to rest, let alone to rest in God’s presence among God’s people?

If we are to recapture Sabbath rest for our lives, we need to recapture its importance. While Sabbath keeping is a mandate in the 10 Commandments, most of us view it more as a suggestion than a command, as an option rather than a requirement.

Our history with Sabbath keeping and the reality of life today are major obstacles to keeping Sabbath rest.

How many of you can remember blue laws, when nothing was open on Sunday, restricting work for Christians? How many of you can remember being restricted in what you could or could not do on Sunday, other than church and family obligations? Can you remember not even being allowed to play on that day?

I am too young for blue laws, yet I can remember Sundays being for church and family. While not extremely restricted, by junior high we had a Sunday pattern of worship in Middletown, lunch at my grandparent’s house in Miamisburg, then back to church for youth group or choir practice in the evening. Sometimes we would spend Sunday afternoons napping. Sometimes finishing homework. Sometimes taking a walk at Cox Arboretum.

Nowadays, however, Sunday is crowded by sports or work or preparing for the week ahead.

Sunday may not be a day of rest, or even of worship, if you work in retail, healthcare or entertainment. And I admit, my family likes to go out to eat after church. It is a way we can eat and relax together. So our eating out forces others to work.

So what can Sabbath rest look like in our busy lives, whether or not that rest occurs on a Sunday?

First, Dorothy Bass reminds us what Sabbath is not. Sabbath is not a day for work, for commerce, or for worry. It is not a day in which we work for a living. It is not a day in which we spend what we have earned. It is not a day for shopping. Sabbath is also not a day for worry, which can often happen when we are bill paying or making our to-do lists.

--Taken from Dorothy Bass “Keeping Sabbath: Reviving a Christian Practice”

in *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People”* 1997

found on religion-online.org

Instead, Sabbath is a day to be intentional in taking holy time for God and for those close around us. It is a day for worship or study. It is a day for wasted, unscripted time with family or close friends. It is a time to disconnect from our gadgets in order to reconnect with God, to rest and listen, to learn and remember who and whose we are. Sabbath can be taken whether you believe you have too little or too much time on your hands.

Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian minister, observed Sabbath time with his wife on Mondays, since Sundays were their busiest days. They would often drive to the country, share a psalm, silently hike for several hours, or enjoy a quiet evening at home. --ibid

Although I would encourage worship as part of any Sabbath routine, sometimes our Sabbaths are as creative and flexible as our varied schedules and our varied personalities. Prior to kids, Ken would spend Sabbath time on the golf course while I sat and read a book or took a nap.

Whatever you do for Sabbath rest, remember—we are called to a regular rhythm of rest and worship, of wasted time and renewal. We are called to one day a week when we receive from God rather than give to the world. We are called to a regular spiritual reboot that lessens our chance of system overload.

..”It’s a comment on our whole manner of life,” says author Wayne Muller. "If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath. Our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create sabbath for us."

-Belden Lane “Holy Silence” 2001 religion-online.org

So before we become ill from running the rat race and refusing to pay attention to road signs that say Stop, may we be intentional in our choices to allow for more Sabbath time in our lives, times to rest, reflect and give thanks for God.

Then, once we have paused long enough to listen and give thanks, may we once again hear Jesus’ words: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

I often use this passage at funerals, as we think about eternal rest.

Yet when I look deeper at the context of these words in Matthew, they are powerful words of invitation not only to rest, but to reorient our lives by following Jesus.

And these words really weren’t written to you and me. They were spoken to the least in society—the worn out, overlooked, rejected, overburdened poor and slaves who had little to no control over their life’s circumstances. These were men and women who did not have a concept of a weekend away from work. These were the men and women who were most affected by government policies and taxes that burdened their lives every day. These were the men and women struggling to survive, let alone live.

These were the men and women who wanted to be faithful to God, yet were burdened by the myriad restrictions that had grown up around the 10 commandments:

kosher restrictions, what constituted work on the Sabbath, how far one could walk.

Restrictions that they often did not have the luxury of being able to follow, so were more of a burden than a blessing.

Jesus spoke to the downtrodden of his time:

“Come. You are not alone. Come and redirect your life, no matter your circumstances.”

If we are willing to follow Jesus wherever he leads us, if we are willing to walk alongside the marginalized, if we are willing to stand with those the world ignores, then we can also receive Jesus’ word for us today.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” --MSG

This is the rest of salvation. More than vacation, more than a day away, this is abiding in Christ’s presence in any circumstance.

And when we come to Jesus for rest, we are invited to then take up Jesus’ yoke and learn from him. We are not called to an eternal vacation, but an eternal journey of discipleship, of walking with and learning from Jesus.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Have you ever seen the harness used by a team of oxen to pull a plow? Have you ever seen the pole that the poor use to carry water to and from home? These are yokes that rest on the shoulders, that distribute weight or work evenly. Often the yoke was a symbol of oppression.

Yet Jesus turns it around into a symbol of freedom. We choose whether or not to journey with Jesus. We choose which path we will travel in life.

When we choose to live by faith, we will not be alone on that lifelong road trip. Jesus promises to be with us, always. Jesus promises to share our burdens, to offer direction, to value us as beloved sons and daughters of God.

While at Disney, Ken and I each carried a backpack around the parks, filled with water bottles, snacks, ball caps, ponchos, sunscreen, autograph books, and even a first aid kit. By the end of day 2, my shoulders were aching and my skin was being rubbed raw. Ken tried to lessen my load by exchanging backpacks, which helped some, then Timothy offered to carry it—and carried my load for much of our final two days.

If I am grateful for my son carrying a backpack on vacation, how much more should I be grateful that Jesus’ has carried my sin to Calvary, and invites me to journey beside him, and rest in is his word, his presence, his grace, his love?

We are called to pay attention to the road signs that calls us to rest. Which signs especially call to you today? Are you being called to make time weekly for Sabbath care, time for rest for body, mind and spirit, time to unplug and unwind, time with family and with God? Or are you being called to accept Jesus’ invitation to take up the yoke of Christ, to learn from him how to live in this life, to find rest in your soul?

While some of us may be tempted to stay at the beach or in the mountains forever, on a permanent vacation away from the cares and work of this world, we are not called to sleep at the rest area. That is not to be our permanent home.

Our times of rest are our pauses in life, from which we are then sent forth to work and serve, to love and forgive, to fight for justice and care for our neighbor.

So as we go forth today, into this week, may we rest, breathe, reflect and just be, renewed to continue on the road we call faith, the journey of living for Jesus in the midst of everyday life.

May it be so. Let us pray.