

Session #6: God's Gift Economy: Learning to be a Community of Rest

Focal Question What can we say about the distinct shape of God's in-breaking reign to which we are called to be embodied witnesses/signposts?

God's Economy The dynamic at the heart of God's reign: an economy of the open hand that entails first *receiving* God's good and transformative gifts and then *keeping them in circulation*.

Mt 10:7-8: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

Preeminence of Love "God is love. . . . We love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:7-21)

Agape: The relentless pursuit of the well-being of another through the giving of oneself.

The Gift of Faith as Trust God's economy: We trust because God first trusted us. (Ponder all that God has entrusted to us as stewards.)

The Gift of Forgiveness God's economy: We forgive because God in Christ has forgiven us (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) Matthew 6:12-15 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The Gift of Rest and its Relationship to the Gift of Good Work

Good work offers us the privilege of participating with God in bringing a greater measure of healing and wholeness to a broken world.

Good rest offers us the privilege of stepping back from our work to reflect on the meaning and purpose of our lives; to give thanks and praise to the Triune God who creates, redeems and sustains all that exists; to take delight in all of God's creation, including the work of our hands when that work contributes to God's reign of *shalom*.

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. [Genesis 1:31-2:3 ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. **2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. ²On the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.]

Deut. 5:12-15 ¹²“Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁴But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

Mark 2:27-28 ²⁷Then [Jesus] said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, ²⁸so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Reflection Questions:

1. The Exodus commandment to remember the Sabbath (20:8-11) is grounded in the story of creation. Since we are created in God's image, what behavioral cues do we take from what we see of God in this story?
2. In Deuteronomy (5:12-15), the commandment to observe the Sabbath is grounded in the story of Exodus, God's act of liberation. How do people freed from slavery celebrate their liberation? What kinds of justice do they wish for others? How might Sabbath-keeping help us resist various forms of enslavement today, for ourselves and for others?
3. How might ceasing work one day a week reshape your work and attitudes on the other six? What is the advantage of a pattern of Sabbath time, as opposed to snatching odd moments or hours of Sabbath time? What are the advantages to keeping Sabbath on Sunday? Who might not be able to keep Sabbath on Sunday? How might we enable them to keep Sabbath another time?
4. How is Sabbath-keeping a way to honor the generosity of our Maker? How does our society's Sabbath-keeping (or lack thereof) express our relation to the created world? In what ways can members of a worshiping community help one another step off the treadmill of work-and-spend and into the circle of glad gratitude for the gifts of God?
5. God seems to have created the world with certain life-giving rhythms, rhythms that are good for us and our well-being, but also good for the rest of the created order. There are daily rhythms (sleep and work), weekly rhythms (Sabbath and work), and even rhythms across the years (Sabbath years and Jubilee). But in each case honoring these rhythms requires us to acknowledge limits. What life-giving rhythms do you regularly embrace? Your parish? What challenges do you and your parish face in seeking to honor these rhythms? What creative ways can you imagine addressing these challenges as an act of trust?
6. Given your understanding of the gift of sabbath and its purpose, what kinds of activities do you think are most appropriate during Sabbath-time? Least appropriate and to be avoided whenever possible? To be clear, engaging in or refraining from certain activities is not because these activities are *inherently* problematic, but because of the ways these activities shape us in profound ways. Sabbath is first of all about the kind of people we are called to become, and in light of that, the courage and trust to name and address those things from which we need to be liberated in order to be that kind of people.

Resources:

Practicing Our Faith: <https://practicingourfaith.org/practices/keeping-sabbath/>

Jubilee USA Network: https://www.jubileeusa.org/the_jubilee_story

In the Old Testament, the practice of the year of Jubilee was understood as an extension of the rhythm of Sabbath to the realm of economics. This link is to a movement calling for, among other things, the cancellation of debt for the world's poorest countries.

Sabbath (Two-part documentary just released): <https://video.mpt.tv/show/sabbath/>

Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Used in recent Lenten Study)

Wayne Muller, *Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (Recommended by Laura Teel)