



Roanoke, Virginia  
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**“The Seventh Day”**  
Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Rev. Rachel C. Thompson

Our Scripture reading today comes from the book of Deuteronomy, right in the middle of Moses’ second proclamation of the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. We first hear the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus, and we hear them again in Deuteronomy, with some slight changes. It seems the people of Israel needed another reminder, and so do we. Moses tells the people that this is the word he received from the Lord, and I hope you’ll receive it as such this morning.

**Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. **13** Six days you shall labor and do all your work. **14** But 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. **15** Remember 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. This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

I like to think I’m pretty good at keeping the Ten Commandments.

You shall not murder.

Check.

You shall not steal.

Also check.

Honor your father and mother.

Most of the time, check.

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy...

I don’t know about you, but I’ve got some room to grow.

It’s true that some of the Ten Commandments are easier to figure out than others. You shall not murder is a little more cut and dry than you shall have no other gods but God. That one is trickier. Don’t lie? Don’t be jealous of what your friends have? Don’t use God’s name lightly? All tricky.

But we sort of know they're right. Collectively as a community, we acknowledge that that's how we should behave, how we want to behave. We know they're right.

But observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, sometimes we have to be convinced about that one.

Because somewhere deep down in our earnest little Protestant work ethic hearts, we're not really sure it's true that rest is a God-ordained value.

But back in Exodus, the first time God goes through the Ten Commandments, God says it clearly, I made the world in six days, and on the seventh day I took a break. So follow my example.

I can just imagine God like woman in the garden sitting down on a rock when her work is done, traces of dirt still left on her hands. She looks around the garden, breathes, and smiles, taking time to rest in the beauty of all that she has accomplished.

That's what we're called to. But we don't believe it.

I spend a lot of my life with teenagers, so trust me when I tell you that this disbelief in the value of rest starts early. The tendency of our culture is towards over scheduling, it's go go go go go even when kids are small. Which may be a contributing factor to why anxiety disorders and thoughts of self-harm are on the rise among children and teens, or why 62 percent of undergraduate college students report experiencing overwhelming anxiety in the last year.

I'm not a doctor, I'm not a scientist, so don't take this as a scientific report. But I am a theologian, so take this as a theological report. God says the seventh day is meant to be a Sabbath, God says that a fundamental human value is rest, and we are killing ourselves to ignore him.

Now, don't worry, this is not a sermon where I'm going to stand up here and say how terrible it is that kids sports games are now scheduled on Sundays, or how people seem to like being at the lake more than they like being in church (go figure), or how wouldn't it be nice if we could go back to the good old days where people respected the Sabbath and kept the seventh day holy. This is not that sermon. I mean, sure, it would make my life as a youth pastor a lot easier if I didn't have to compete with my arch nemesis Travel Soccer, but that's not the point.

The point is that God says rest is good for us.

And it's not good just for us. By the time we get to Deuteronomy, the commandment changes a bit, and intensifies. This second time around God doesn't just say I rested so you should too. This time, when God calls the people of Israel to rest, God emphasizes that their sons and daughters and their male and female slaves and the foreigners who are living in their land should rest, too. For God, rest is a value that transcends any kind of human boundaries, it's bigger than the systems we've set up so that we can survive, God wants every person to be able to rest. And why? God says, Remember. Remember, you used to be slaves in Egypt, and you did not save yourselves, I saved you. Your future is in my hands and when you rest, you remember that your future is in *my* hands and you cannot by your own efforts save yourself. And that, my friends, is rest. That, my friends, is freedom.

The trouble is, we're terrible at resting and we're not very good at remembering. Instead, we get worried. You know how it feels. To be worried that you won't have what you need. To be worried that your kids won't have what they need. To be worried that you haven't done enough, exercised enough, learned enough. To be worried that if you don't keep up you'll get left behind in the dust.

Maybe the idea of rest sounds good to you. Maybe the idea of some kind of Sabbath, a seventh day or even a couple of hours, set aside for rest, restoration and worship of the God who

gave you life sounds good to you, maybe that's why you're here. But for many of us, we're just so worried that we don't even know how to begin.

So the question is, how do we remind ourselves to remember that God is in control?

It's not the kind of problem that gets solved in one day. The fact that God has to include the instruction to rest in the ten commandments suggests that God knew that we'd be terrible at it, we'd need to repeat it over and over again. Rest is something we're always going to wrestle with.

But I want to offer just one suggestion, one practical response to help train yourself to remember that you are allowed find a seventh day and let it be holy, that it is good for you to rest.

I can take no personal credit for it, because it comes straight from the mouth of Jesus.

He's sitting around with his friends, and first he tells them, "Do not worry," which as you know in the whole entire history of worrying, saying, "Don't worry," has never convinced anyone to stop.

But then Jesus says, Look around.

Look at the birds. Watch them just exist. They don't plant anything. They don't hoard stuff in barns. They just exist. And God feeds them. You're so much more precious than a bird.

Look around.

Look at the flowers. Watch them grow without even trying. They don't stay late at the office in the evenings, they don't think about how to keep up with the latest trends. They just exist. And they are beautiful. God will take even better care of you than that.

So look around, and trust that the God who made all of this holds your future in his hands.

That's part of why today is important. We're blessed today on Picnic Sunday to be outside, out here with this incredible view, surrounded by this beautiful world that God has made, and it's like the heavens are calling to us, offering us a chance to remember to rest.

Study after study shows that being outside is good for our brains. Spending time walking in the woods has positive effects on our moods and psychological well-being. Even just having a potted plant around helps us to feel better, more secure. And again, I'm a theologian not a scientist, but I'd like to say it's not just about our biology. There's something about observing God's care for and creativity in nature that helps us to feel more secure, to slow down, to rest, because the evidence of God's care for the world helps us to trust that we are included in God's care also.

You want to keep the Sabbath? You want to figure out how to rest?

Go outside. Look around.

Look at the shadows cast by the sun shining slantways through the leaves in the early evening.

Look at the clouds as they gather and thunder and roll, bringing the rain that will quench the deepest longings of a weary earth.

Look at the beginnings of the flower forcing her little green leaves up through the ground.

Look at the bright red of the cardinal as he hops along your neighbor's fence, singing out at the top of his lungs.

Look at the rainbow, stretching God's faithfulness across the entire expanse of the sky.

Look at the faces in this pavilion, each one bearing a particular truth about who God is.

Look at the trees standing tall, reaching their hands up to heaven.

Stand on top of a mountain, spread your arms out wide and take it in.

If God loves the earth so much, if God takes care of the earth so well, just think about how much God loves you. Just think about how secure you are resting in God's hands.

I'm going to close with a poem written by the great Mary Oliver. In terms of poets who have understood and been able to capture the beauty and power of the created world, she's one of the best. She gets how noticing and experiencing the world around us can draw us into a place of rest and trust in God. If you've ever been on a youth trip with me, it's likely that I've woken you up in the morning by reciting this poem, so it might sound familiar to some of you. I hope you'll all receive it as a gift this Picnic Sunday. It's called "Why I Wake Early."

### **Why I Wake Early**

Hello, sun in my face.

Hello, you who made the morning

and spread it over the fields

and into the faces of the tulips

and the nodding morning glories,

and into the windows of, even, the

miserable and the crotchety –

best preacher that ever was,

dear star, that just happens

to be where you are in the universe

to keep us from ever-darkness,

to ease us with warm touching,

to hold us in the great hands of light –

good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day

in happiness, in kindness.

Amen.