

Breaking the routine

[Luke 13:10-17,](#)

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One of my favourite movies is the 1993 comedy Groundhog Day – which tells the story of a miserably selfish, arrogant TV weatherman who gets trapped in a time loop, where he is forced to relive the same day over and over again in the same small town - no matter what he does that day, the next morning everything resets, and he wakes up again in the same town, the same bed, on the same day, February 2nd, Groundhog Day. At one point he ends his day drowning his sorrows at the bar in the local bowling alley with a few of the local drunks, and when they try to cheer him up, he asks: What would you do, if you were stuck in one place, and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered? And they answer - “that about sums it up for me.” And I remember thinking this was a really funny movie, until the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and all of a sudden, life felt like Groundhog Day, like we were all stuck in a time loop where nothing ever changed, you kept going through the motions, each day the same as the one before. And honestly, even without a global shutdown, life can feel like that, like nothing ever changes - you wake up, get dressed, go to work, come home, watch TV til it’s time for bed, and the next day, you do it all over again. It is really, really easy to let your life turn into Groundhog Day, where each day is exactly the same as the day before, you’re just

going through the motions, work eat sleep over and over again, day in and day out.

And I think that's why God gave us the gift of the sabbath. God knew that it was far too easy for human beings to just turn our entire lives into that kind of monotonous treadmill, where we let each and every day be consumed by the work we think we need to get done, spending all our time in the same monotonous drudgery over and over again, work eat sleep over and over again. So right in the very fabric of creation, God wrote a commandment for humanity to take a day, each and every week, and step off the treadmill. Stop working, break the routines you've been following for the past six days, and just rest. In the story of creation, after creating the entire world, God decides to take a day of rest, but that day isn't for God's benefit - it's not like God was so tuckered out by shaping each individual termite that a day in a lounge chair by the pool was desperately needed. God doesn't grow tired and weary, God doesn't need rest, but we do - the sabbath isn't for God's benefit, it's for our benefit. Taking one day a week to break those routines of work, eat, sleep, to step off the treadmill and rest for one day, that gives us the opportunity to actually look around at the world and see beyond our routines, see beyond the work we've been doing, the tasks we think are so important, and actually see how beautiful and precious this world truly is, how deeply good God's creation really is. God went to all this trouble to create this world, and at each and every step God

called it Good, so God took that day of rest at the end of creation to make sure that we would appreciate how really and truly Good creation actually is - to lift our eyes up from the drudgery and the routine and in our rest, recognize how good, how loving, how wonderful God is.

That's how the Sabbath is supposed to work – a day of rest to break our human routines and give us an opportunity every week to stop and remember how good God's love for us truly is. But it hasn't always worked that way. We human beings are very, very good at figuring out ways to take otherwise good things and mess them up, and we've done that with the Sabbath. All too often we let our work and our routine, the monotony and drudgery of our daily lives, our obsessions with rules and accomplishments, we let all of that sneak into the sabbath, turning our day of rest into just another day of following the rules. Instead of being a break from the treadmill where we see God's goodness with new eyes, we can turn the sabbath into a slightly different kind of treadmill, we trade one kind of obligation and obedience in for a different one. That's what happened to the people of Israel in Jesus' day - the religious leaders made sure that instead of a day of rest where you could focus on God's grace and goodness and love, the sabbath was a day with even more rules to follow, even more obligations to focus on, and you spent all your time so paralyzed by what you could and could not do that there was no time to actually enjoy God's creation, to celebrate God's love - all you could do was just hide inside your house and hope that you

weren't accidentally breaking the law when you needed to use the bathroom. Rest becomes work, grace becomes obligation, and it gets harder and harder for anyone to see the love of God through the gift of the Sabbath.

So in our reading today from the gospel of Luke, when Jesus enters the local synagogue to teach the people gathered there and he spots this suffering woman, struggling with a disability for eighteen years, Jesus knew that it was the Sabbath that day. This wasn't a case of him getting his calendar mixed up. And Jesus knew that according to the rules of the synagogue officials, healing someone on the Sabbath counted as work, and was therefore forbidden – healing the woman would be breaking the law. And of course, Jesus heals the woman anyway. He reaches out and touches her, speaks words of comfort and power and love, and she is set free from her infirmity, and she praises God. And Jesus makes it perfectly clear that this is exactly how God wants the Sabbath to be. This healing isn't just Jesus making a temporary exception to the rules. This is Jesus revealing to the people what the Sabbath is truly supposed to be about. Because if the whole point of the Sabbath is to reveal how good and loving God is, how wonderful God's creation is, to remind yourself of the grace and power of the God who created you and loves you, what better way to demonstrate that than to see a woman healed after eighteen years of suffering? What better way to spend your Sabbath than watching the power of God at work right there in front of

you, watching one of God's children rediscover the goodness of the creation God had blessed her with? Jesus tells the crowd gathered there that the Sabbath isn't about rules, it's about life. You wouldn't deprive even your animals of the necessities of life on the Sabbath – you'd give water to a thirsty donkey or ox, you'd give them what they need to survive and thrive – so why wouldn't Jesus give this woman what she needs to thrive again, so that she can see God's love at work in her life after eighteen years of darkness and pain? The power of God at work in the world, that is the entire point of the Sabbath, that's what the Sabbath was made for – to stop focusing on yourself, on your own work and worries, your own rules and regulations, and break the routines just long enough to see the love of God breaking in all around you. That's what happened in that synagogue so many years ago – Jesus made that day the Sabbath, a real Sabbath, when everyone there was jolted awake out of their routines, out of their complacency and preoccupation and pride, and they were able to witness the power of God, and rest in God's grace and love. That's what the Sabbath is all about.

And that's still what the Sabbath is all about. Our time together as God's people each week is supposed to be a gift, an opportunity to break from the obligations and routines and the rules of our own little Groundhog days, to leave behind the work eat sleep cycle and here today just rest, rest in God's grace and glory at work in creation, in our lives, in one another. That's the point of all of this – that's the reason we

come each and every Sunday – we come to be blessed. We come to be fed. We come to be healed. We come to find rest for our souls. And yet we are still very, very good at turning all this into more work. More obligations. More rules. All too often, Christians turn church into just another treadmill, a minefield of social interactions, volunteering opportunities, passive-aggressive plate passing, judgment and condemnation for every way you don't measure up to whatever the standard of that particular congregation happens to be, worrying about if you're wearing the right thing, doing the right thing, saying the right words, worrying if your children are behaving in an appropriately churchy manner, so that at the end of the morning, instead of coming away from church refreshed and rested, you feel more exhausted than ever. And that's not what God wants for us. That's not the purpose of the Sabbath. We come here to find rest, rest from our routine, rest from the expectations of the world around us, rest from constantly trying to measure up and constantly falling short, and we come to find God's power and grace and love, neverending, everlasting. We come to be healed, to find in Jesus Christ the one who lifts us up and makes us whole and sets us free from all the obligations and rules and routines that we've placed on ourselves. We come here to see the grace of God at work, here in this place, to have our eyes opened to see creation the way God sees it, as so very, very good. All the work we do in church – all the effort we put in, all the preparation and service and activity that

happens in this place – it is all meant to be in service of that goal, bringing healing and life to God's people so God's people can bring glory to God.

And when we do that – when we spend our Sabbath in true rest, appreciating God's creation, experiencing God's power and grace and love, then we can start noticing how good and loving God is all during the rest of the week. When we've had our eyes and attention focused on God's love on Sunday morning, that goodness has a way of breaking through our routines so that all the rest of the week, even during our work, even while we're on the treadmill, God's grace breaks through and we see God's goodness for ourselves, not just on our day of rest, but every day. When we spend the sabbath resting and rejoicing in how good God is, how loving God is, how wonderful God's creation truly is, that rest and rejoicing has a way of sneaking into the rest of the week, and giving us moments of sabbath all week long. We come here today to have our eyes reset to see the world and ourselves as God sees it, so that when we go back into the world, we go as God's healed, saved and sanctified children, ready to see God's love at work every day, able to understand that today and everyday is the day that God has made, this is the time of God's favour, this is the day of salvation, the day when we can share God's love and speak God's word and experience God's power here and now and everyday all week long. Today, may the one who does not grow tired or weary renew our strength, so we may soar on

wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint, each and every day. Today, may our eyes be opened, our weakness be healed, may we set aside our routines and rules and fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, on his goodness and love, today and every single day, every Sabbath moment, until the kingdom comes. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.