

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Mary Newberg Gale  
Sunday, July 13, 2025

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Let us pray.

Loving and faithful God, you have called us to this place for this time. Your voice rings in our lives, calling us to pay heed, to turn, to still ourselves even for a moment to experience your presence that we might be strengthened to carry on in the world. In this moment, I ask that you open our hearts and minds that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts might be acceptable in your sight, oh God. Amen.

This morning, we are on our second of our Sabbath sermon series for the summer. That's a lot of S's, Sabbath Sermon Series. And we're turning to the commandment for Sabbath, particularly this morning from the book of Deuteronomy. So, our first reading comes from Deuteronomy chapter 5, starting with verse 12. Hear these words from our Hebrew ancestors.

*Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 any resident alien in your towns. so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 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.*

Friends, these are the words of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

As I shared a moment ago, this is not the standard fourth commandment that we often hear repeated or that we see printed in lists of the Ten Commandments. This iteration of the commandments comes from the book of Deuteronomy. How many of you knew that there were two full sets of the Ten Commandments in the Bible? That's good. I didn't know that till I went to seminary. So, you guys are way ahead of me. But there is...what is happening is when the people come out of Egypt and are at Mount Sinai, the story that we know that's in our cultural context when Moses went up to the mountain and God gifted him with the tablets and he came down, and they had built an idol. So he broke them, and he had to go back up and get the tablets again and reteach the people what the commandments are. That happens in the book of Exodus. And after that, the Israelites spend 40 years wandering in the desert. 40 years that are accompanied, that are brought together. I don't know the word I was looking for. 40 years that are encapsulated, that was the word I was looking for, in the rest of the book of Exodus, in the books of Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Leviticus. Wow. until we get today to Deuteronomy. And Deuteronomy is at its very core Moses's last speech, his farewell speeches to the people who

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have traveled with him over these 40 years. So, as part of that speech, as they wait on the brink of Canaan, the land of milk and honey that God brought them out of slavery for, Moses reiterates those Ten Commandments, the Ten Commandments that were practices to center the people's life around God and around others. You remember that the first commandment is about relationship with God. In fact, the first three commandments are about how we are to be in relationship with God. The last six commandments are about how we are to be in relationship with one another. The fourth commandment, the commandment for Sabbath, is the one that bridges those two themes of the commandments that God has given us. Now Moses reiterates these commandments again because he is worried that the people will think that they can manage on their own. As they stand on the brink of a new future, he becomes anxious and worried that the people will think God has delivered them and there is no need for this deep relationship with God anymore, that the relationship they had with God in the wilderness isn't necessary in the land of promise. But Moses knew that, indeed, it is vital. And so he tells them again in this bridge between the reality of the wilderness and the hope of the promised land. He says again and again throughout the book of Deuteronomy. "Remember," he says in these passages, "remember, remember, remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and God brought you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Remember that the system of Pharaoh, the system of slavery and bricks and bricks without straw, of more and more, of labor upon labor. That system of anxiety and coercion was broken by God. Remember that before you enter into the land of promise."

As Courtney shared last week, Walter Brueggemann, my seminary professor Walter Brueggemann, wrote a book a number of years ago, I believe in 2016, entitled Sabbath as Resistance. The central thought in this book is that Sabbath is the break. It is the pause that permits us to remember just as Moses was commanding us. Wally centers this book around the resistance to anxiety, the resistance to coercion, the resistance to exclusivity, the resistance to multitasking. And he argues that Sabbath is not only an opportunity. It is a requirement to view, to reimagine our world through the lens of God's kingdom, asking us to hold Sabbath in the same way that Moses asked the people of Israel before they entered the promised land, to re-imagine a world that is a system of rest which counteracts a system of anxiety. He says this in the preface. "Thus, I have come to think that the fourth commandment on Sabbath is the most difficult and most urgent of the commandments in our society, because it summons us to intent and conduct that defies the most elemental requirements of a commodity propelled society that specializes in control and entertainment, otherwise bread and circuses, a society that specializes in anxiety and violence." Throughout the book, Brueggemann argues that anxiety leads, the anxiety of what is next, what will happen, what is going to happen to me, where will I get my protection from, that anxiety which is a normal human emotion and response. But unchecked and doubled together as a way of living, that anxiety leads directly to violence, he says, "to violence expressed in military

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adventurism that enjoys huge patriotic themes of support. Violence against the earth that is signaled by overuse. Violence in sport. Violence in our neighborhoods where guns are now the icon of security. Violence against every vulnerable population. Sexual aggression against the young, and war on the poor which is accomplished by laws and banking procedures.”

Walter Brueggemann is arguing strongly that God's commandment for Sabbath is the way that we interrupt the broken systems of the world that thrive on anxiety and violence. On the Sabbath, you do not have to do more. You don't have to sell more. You don't have to control more. You don't have to know more. You don't have to have your kids in a wide variety of extracurricular activities or you're failing them. You don't have to be younger or wealthier or more beautiful. You don't have to score more, earn more. You just have to be with God and with each other. This is the central piece that God is directing the Israelites and us, that the systems of Egypt, the systems of our world, are systems that destroy rather than nurture. They are systems that dehumanize rather than build community. And God calls us to a different path.

So if we hold this to be true, then what is Sabbath practice? It is, as Courtney said last week, the way that we prepare ourselves for interaction with God. We prepare ourselves to be in the presence of the Holy One. Sabbath, contrary to what our culture tells us, Sabbath is not simply self-care. It's not that it's not self-care, but you're not practicing Sabbath just because you took a 30-minute break to get your nails done or went for a run or took your stupid little mental health walk to help your stupid mental health and felt better at the end.. Sabbath is not a chance to consume. Sabbath is not a momentary pause. It is neither singular nor individual. And yet, is it any wonder that an anxious capitalist system tries to convince us that Sabbath is just another chance to consume something? Just another chance to try and fill the emptiness with us, within us, with food that does not satisfy?

In order to find Sabbath rest, when we embrace Sabbath as resistance to the cultures of the world, we have to internalize that rest is not laziness. Too often our culture says that if we are not go go go going, if we are not producing or consuming or having side hustles or grinding away, we are lazy. Sabbath is not laziness. Sabbath is a reordering of our priorities. It is, as Moses said, “remembering.” It is resetting and putting us in right relationship with God and with each other. Tricia Hersey, is the founder of the NAP ministry, which many of you may have seen on Instagram. She's a wonderful follow, in her book *Rest is Resistance* says this. ”Managing imagining rest looks like so many things. The possibilities are endless and infinite. Rest looks like tapping into and listening to what your body and your soul want. It's extra time while bathing, even an extra 10 minutes of silence. Rest is taking a leisurely walk. Sabbath rest is dancing. Rest can be a tea ritual, allowing you to meditate while breathing in each warm sip.

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Rest is not returning an email immediately and maintaining healthy boundaries. Rest is rejecting urgency, detoxing from social media. Rest is listening and healing from individual trauma. Rest is journaling so that you can be a witness to your own inner thoughts. Rest is radical in our world—true rest.”

Part of the reason that Moses reiterates this commandment to rest again in Deuteronomy is he reminds the people. He doesn't say to them, "God, the God of your ancestors made a covenant with you in Egypt." He says 40 years later to the people gathered there with him, “God makes a covenant with you, the God that brought you out of the land of Egypt,” which is powerful knowing that there were people in that caravan that would have been born along the way, people that had no memory of Egypt or the rules and structures of Pharaoh. But God's making a covenant with you. It means that God's covenant is immediately contemporary for every generation. This covenant that God has with us is not a thing, something that happened once. It happens now.

So God's command for Sabbath rest happens now for us. People who keep Sabbath live all seven days differently. It's not something that's just a pause in your Sunday. And I think that that is incredibly vital and important right now in our lives, friends, because the way we interact with the world is incredibly important right now. We hear “wars and rumors of wars,” to quote scripture. We see pain and suffering and lines being drawn. You can't turn on a TV or radio or your phone without some new catastrophe that is raising our anxiety, that is terrifying us and making us worried for the future of our world. To be clear, this is not new. This is what empire always is. Whether it's Egyptian or Roman or British or American or everything in between. Empire thrives on anxiety and coercion, on telling you who is out, on telling you, on picking something and saying this is what's wrong and here is who to blame for it. And the people the empire tells you to blame are never the people who are actually responsible for what has happened.

God's call to Sabbath is a call to draw the circle ever wider. It's a call no longer to turn a blind eye, which is why Sabbath practice is so vital. It's a call to see God in each other, to resist those narratives that say that some matter and some do not, that some deserve, that some belong and others are out. God says it clearly. Not just you are to rest, but your children, your servants, your livestock, the resident alien in your midst. Everyone falls under God's umbrella of Sabbath.

So what does that mean for you and me?

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Frankly, right now, I think that it means that Sabbath, when we practice it fully, when we can sit and find the rest that is meaningful to us, when we commit ourselves to resting in God, to gathering together here for worship, to reading our scripture, to living as faithful people in the world, Sabbath gives us a chance to step off the anxiety roller coaster. It gives us a place to give our bodies the space to process the things that are happening around us.

It gives us an opportunity to, like the Israelites, remember whose we are and to place our trust and to center our lives in the one who is continually delivering us from bondage. And not just us, but everyone.

Because the journey toward the kingdom is a long journey, friends, and we need our rest and our rejuvenation in God in order that we can be in right relationship with one another.

Let us trust in the one who has delivered us from Egypt. and calls us to continue delivering others from their bondage. Amen.