

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Courtney Veazey
Sunday, July 6, 2025

Prayer for Illumination

God of abundant life,
your grace is our daily bread.
Nourish us by your Word
and fill us with your Spirit
so that we may grow in faith and love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A reading from Exodus.

“You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. You shall make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and a molding of gold around the rim. You shall make for it four rings of gold and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim. You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. You shall make its plates and dishes and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me continually.”

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Holy wisdom, holy word.
Thanks be to God.

Seven obscure verses from Exodus giving instructions for building the tabernacle’s table may seem like an unlikely choice for the beginning of our Sabbath sermon series.

And that’s understandable.

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I imagine most sermons exploring the Sabbath may focus on more familiar pieces of our holy scripture – such as “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy”¹ or “You shall keep my Sabbaths and revere my sanctuary: I am the Lord”² or even one of the several stories from our Gospels in which Jesus heals on the Sabbath.

But, for me, the Sabbath is more than a day, more than a commandment, and more than a narrative arc used to theologically argue how Jesus is “the authoritative interpreter of Sabbath laws.”³

The Sabbath is an intentional spiritual practice in which our presence becomes attuned to God’s presence.

The Sabbath is a prayerful ceasing from weariness, numbness, restlessness, distraction, and demands.

The Sabbath moves us away from ceaseless striving and multitasking, so our souls may rest in God’s soul.

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote in his book *sabbath as resistance* that “Multitasking is the drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness. Such practice yields a divided self, with full attention given to nothing.”⁴

¹ Exodus 20:8

² Leviticus 19:30

³ *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, footnote to Matthew 12:8, p. 33.

⁴ p. 67

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Sabbath is a spiritual practice that challenges us to set aside our drive, control, power, and effectiveness, so that our divided self may be reunited and our full attention given to the Presence that breathes life into each of us.

This spiritual practice of “living with greater attention and intention”⁵ is one that must be done continually.

This rhythm of pausing so we may commune and feast with the Presence requires a thoughtful intentionality modeled for us in this morning’s reading from Exodus.

This holy text teaches us that we shall make a table for the bread of the Presence.

A making that requires attention to detail.

Acacia wood.

Two cubits long. One cubit wide. A cubit and a half high.

Four rings fastened to four corners.

Overlayed in gold.

Distractions make us absent as they draw us in different directions.

Specific instructions make us alert as they draw us inward.

Acacia was the primary tree available to the Israelites as they constructed the tabernacle and its furnishings.

⁵ *seven sacred pauses*, Macrina Wiederkehr, p. 11.

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A tree covered in characteristic thorns, I imagine those thorns invited a slowness to their work as they crafted the sanctuary in which God would dwell.

As they made the table for the bread of the Presence.

Shaving down thorns, overlaying the smoothed wood with gold – golden wood that becomes a table and poles for carrying that table.

What thorns do our souls carry that need to be slowly shaved down?

Thorns that the Benedictine nun Macrina Wiederkehr says are caused by “the violence many of us carry in our hearts due to a stressful, multitasking work environment.”⁶

Thorns caused by being so busy that our souls find it hard to catch up.

Thorns caused when we forget to breathe.

Thorns needing to be turned into gold – into a portable table that holds the bread of the Presence.

We need holy elements to encase the woods of our lives and to transform those woods into a sanctuary – into a place where God shall dwell among us.

There is so much coming at us – so many different energies being thrust our way – so many demands upon our attention – and we struggle to know where to look or turn, what to hold and what to set aside.

⁶ *seven sacred pauses*, p. 11.

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Lost and running rampant in our thorny woods, we need a structure to slow us down – a structure that calls us to sit before the bread of the Presence.

We need to make a table.

Sabbath is the spiritual practice of making that table – of intentionally crafting a space to encounter the God who says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Christ’s soul is eager and ready to receive our souls – to give us refreshment and rest – to breathe new life into us – to remind us where our identity truly lies – to draw our attention back to the ground of our being – to free us *from* doing *for* being.

How shall we make tables of acacia wood overlayed in gold? When are those moments and where are those places in which you hear Jesus say, “Come to me, and I will give you rest?”

Perhaps we craft tables through daily prayer, or a weekly ballet class, or a walk with a dear friend or loved one.

Perhaps we craft tables by choosing to set aside our cell phones when sharing a meal – or by limiting the notifications we get on our phones. Y’all know you can do that, right?

Or maybe we craft tables by limiting the amount of news we intake each day. Or by asking for help when we need it. Or by finding a community that holds us in our pain.

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Whatever it is that deepens our breathing and focuses our attention on the One who places that breath within us – whatever it is that frees our souls to crawl into the lap of God’s soul – whatever it is that invites prayerful ceasing – the crafting of the table begins there.

And when we struggle to craft those tables, where do we encounter tables crafted for us?

Tables in which the bread of the Presence is continually on display – set before God and us, waiting to be devoured?

Waiting to be taken, blessed, broken, and given?

The table has been made of wood.

Overlaid with carvings of a crown in a blaze of glory, a baptismal font, a chalice, the Lamb of God, a circular wafer with rays of light, the cross with a winding sheet, and a descending dove.⁷

Overlaid with the carved words, “This do in remembrance of me.”

Come, this morning, and remember – *this* is how you shall make a table. *This* is how you set the bread of the Presence on the table.

Come, remember, and our Savior will give you rest.

⁷ *A History of Idlewild Presbyterian Church*, Perre Magness, p. 96.