

Drawn In:Rest - Exodus 20:8-11

Norwalk Christian Church, March 3, 2019, Epiphany, Transfiguration of Our Lord, Year C, Non-Lectionary "Drawn In" Series

We started this morning in our Adult Sunday School class a new video study on the 10 Commandments. Our guide is this best-selling author of over 50 books and a rebel-rousing Benedictine nun from Pennsylvania, Sister Joan Chittister. And I think we have found, even after one session, that there's a lot more to the Ten Commandments that we thought. It's going to be a good study. (And it's not too late to join us next week, by the way. 10am.)

Our text today comes right from the center of that list of 10 commandments. It's the fourth commandment. Chances are, if I asked you to name all 10 today, you might struggle a little bit. I'm not going to embarrass you--but feel free to zone off for a moment and try to make your own mental list.

We may or may not be able to list all ten commandments when asked, but chances are we're committed to living by them. Perhaps there's a nuance here or there, but most of us would say it's best not to steal, or to covet, or to kill.

Overall, whether we're making a conscience effort of it or not, we pretty much do our best to not break these 10 commandments.

Well...that is, except for one. There is one we treat like it's a suggestion. Purely optional. The fourth commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

Any of you worried about proper Sabbath-keeping? Anyone feel guilty when you have to work on a Sunday, or go to a Soccer Game? Anyone offended that restaurants will be open after worship to feed us lunch?

We don't get that worked up about Sabbath-keeping.

But Christians today do still know how to get worked up about keeping commandments. Last week, a Christian denomination made international news. Usually, when that happens it's not good news. Our brothers and sisters in Christ in the United Methodist Church had a big global gathering in St. Louis. For decades, their denomination (like most mainline churches) has been torn apart over issues of sexuality, in particular, can people who are LGBTQI+ be clergy and can clergy perform same-sex marriages.

In St. Louis, Methodists were to make the decision over two plans--one that would allow congregations to decide for themselves these issues of sexuality, and one that would be more restrictive--even than they had been before. And the global delegates voted in favor of the more restrictive plan.

The temptation for us Christians who see themselves as more open is to diss on the Methodists. But let's be honest for a moment--our church may not have the structure that other denominations have, but we all share the same temptation.

Rule-following. Commandment-keeping. Too often we believe our calling as Christians is to keep laws, and make God happy. Even when we say otherwise, it's often our default. Deep down we fear we might anger God. At the root of churches' oppression of people is that we fear that God will judge us for being too open. That God will smite us if we are gay or accept someone who is.

So, for this we will call huge church meetings and publicly debate the laws of God. But when it comes to Sabbath-Keeping, we all get a pass. Break the sabbath or not--no one seems concerned anymore. And if we were to even keep it, what would that even look like? It's got me wondering--if we were to learn again what it means to keep the Sabbath--to truly rest in God--would we also learn again how to find unity, love, and welcome with one another?

Now, I'm not saying Christians ever really got Sabbath-keeping right. Back in the day, we used to have blue laws--laws that kept alcohol from being sold on Sunday, or, in some places, businesses from even opening on a Sunday. It was the Sabbath--the Lord's Day. We had to keep it holy.

But we didn't make it holy. We just made more laws, trying not to break the "letter" of the law, and we missed the whole point.

Remember the Sabbath day, the commandment says, and keep it holy.⁹ Six 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.

That's the commandment. It's the only one given that tells us why God keeps this one. For in six days God made all that is--then rested the seventh day. So, we, too, should rest. Ourselves. Our children. Our workers. Our livestock. Even the foreigner in town who is not a part of your culture, race, or religious belief--they should get a rest, too.

Rest. This is the commandment. And it might be the hardest commandment to keep.

Today is the last week of our Worship Series, *Drawn In: Living the Creative Life in God*. We've walked through various stages in the creative process, as we've explored together what it means for us to create goodness in this world. We've seen that God is Creator, and we are created in God's image to become Creators with God.

But creating isn't always about doing. Creators must take rests.

Why do we feel so guilty when we take a rest? Like it's dirty or wrong to take a nap. To leave a job undone so we can sleep. To take a day off--go on vacation, or just sit at home and binge-watch Netflix.

Over time, religious people made this commandment all about a stressful set of dos and don'ts on the Sabbath. And then Jesus came along, and started breaking the Sabbath. He healed people on the Sabbath. He prepared food. He said, "The Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath." Meaning--it was intended to be a gift. A blessing. Not a burden.

Christians have taken Jesus to mean, we don't have to pay attention to the Sabbath at all. We can ignore this commandment completely. Churches, in fact, often promote extra busyness on Sundays, further wearing people out instead of providing a chance to rest. But that's not what Jesus said. Jesus didn't say *don't keep the Sabbath*. Jesus said the Sabbath was given to us as a gift.

Sabbath-keeping isn't about doing, it's about being. About reconnecting with who we are, who we are created to be. That we are not just do-ers. We are not producers. We are not workers. We are beings.

We are beloved of God. We are perfect, just the way we are. We don't have to produce to be proven. We don't have to accomplish to be accomplished. We don't have to succeed to be successful. It doesn't all depend upon us. It's not all ours to finish. We don't have to have it all together, because we never will.

We were created to create--and then to rest. And after the rest, to create again.

There's this new trend--maybe you've gone to one of these, these paint parties. You, your significant other, a group of friends, gather with an artist (and usually a bottle of wine) and the artist teaches you how to paint. Well, not really how to paint, but how to paint a certain painting. You do what the artist does. You replicate what the artist tells you to do. And, in the end, you get a fun night and a nice painting.

But, I would dare say, at the end of it, you are not a painter. If your painting looks decent, that only means you're good at following directions. But you're not a painter.

A painter creates, not replicates. A painter doesn't follow instructions. A painter follows their heart, instincts, nudges, creative impulses--not rules, directions, and commandments.

A lot of times, we see the Christian life as one big paint party. If you want to do it right, then follow instructions. Do what the teacher says.

But beautiful people, we were not created to follow-directions. We were created to create.

And maybe it's time we all just take a rest from the burden of rule-keeping, and have a good sabbath. To rest, and know, it's not up to us. God isn't angry at us. Our imperfections--those are beauty marks. Our inadequacies--those are what make us unique. Your God created you--just as you are. Your God is proud of you. Rest, and know that God is God, and you are not. It's not all up to you, for God is in control.

You are not called to do and to produce, to please and follow the rules. You are created to be. To love. To create more love in this world.

In some ways, the Sabbath might be the most important thing we could do. For when we reconnect again with who God is and who we were created to be, then everything else begins to fall in line. Our need to please is given up. Our need to force others into our way of seeing the world disappears. Our fear of God goes away. And broken community begins to heal. And once all that junk falls away, we can begin to hear again that voice inside of us--the creative impulse of the Holy Spirit inspiring us.

Actually, I think if we learn to truly rest in God, we don't even need to worry about the other commandments. For when you find your rest in God, you learn again how to love yourself and your neighbors.

With all the fighting and dividing going on among Christians these days, it's long been time that we just give it a rest.

What the church needs now is not another big denominational gathering where we decide who God loves and doesn't love. What the church needs is Sabbath! Rest! To rest in God and be drawn into God's heart--the Gospel truth, that God loves us, God loves me, God loves you, God loves our neighbor, and there is nothing we could ever do to change that.

May it be so. Amen.

There's a song in our hymnal we have never sung before, but the words are beautiful and connect us again to our creative God. Katie and Janine are going to sing it for us. The words are in your bulletin. Let us praise our Colorful Creator, who is not out there making rules, but who is creating beauty.