



Holy Reset

SCRIPTURE:
Genesis 2:2-3, Luke
5:15, Matthew 11:28

February 7, 2021 — Sermon by Rev. Melanie Hardison and Rev. Sally Wright

It was time to go. [Rev. Melanie Hardison speaking.] And I was having one of those visceral, bodily reactions: I did not want to leave. I had just spent 48 hours nestled in a cozy little cabin in the woods, all by myself, on a silent retreat. My body had rested, my mind had rested, and my soul had rested in God. I felt relaxed and slow, peaceful and content. And now the retreat was over. It was time to go, but all I wanted to do was stay.

The retreat was just last summer, a few months into the pandemic. And what happened there is nothing you would find on a to-do list. I took naps. I took long walks in the woods. I sat and listened to rain on the tin roof. I spent time in prayer and did some writing and I spent several hours just sitting on the screened porch, watching the rain and letting my mind wander. I completely disentangled from all the chaos of daily life—including the news and the internet. Now, I kind of like my phone. I like being connected to people, through phone calls and texts and Facebook. But for those 48 hours, I mostly turned it off and took a break.

When the retreat ended, I was changed. I was not excited to turn my phone back on. I recoiled at the thought of getting on the interstate and going anywhere quickly. So I drove away from the retreat with my phone buried deep in my bag, and I took the scenic backroads and saw things I'd never seen before. Every step I took away from the retreat, I just wanted to go back. I wanted to stay in that deep connected place where I felt God close and the distractions of the world far away. It was a good, solid reset.

And it left me wondering: How can I get to this place more often—without going out of town? Could I do a little piece of this at home? After all, Jews observe a Sabbath day each week, and some Christians have started doing that, too. Could I do a mini reset each week, or take a full day of sabbath once a month?

Rev. Sally Wright: Wow, Melanie. That sounds amazing. I struggle with sabbath, especially with two young children at home. It seems as if there is always something needing to be done. But with inspiration from your summer sabbath retreat, I have two practices that I have identified and return to regularly.

The first practice is silence in the morning. Yes, even with two kids, a wife, and a dog, at 5 a.m. no one else seems to be awake. I use that time for prayer and for silence. I don't even move around a whole lot—I just remain silent and still.

Second, I can carve out time for a long, hot bath. These 20-30 minutes provide regular rest from tasks on my to-do list, as well as some moments to connect with God and delight in wonderful smells and bath salts. I seem to easily connect with God through these two practices. Neither last longer than about 30 minutes to an hour. I always wonder how Jewish people practice an entire day of Sabbath.

Rev. Hardison: Thank you, Sally, you just answered my question!

Rev. Wright: You know, I wonder what God does on the Sabbath day.

Rev. Hardison: Right? But I think all it says is that God rested. I don't think God did anything, except to bless the Sabbath and consecrate it and call it holy. Right? What does the text say?

Rev. Wright: Yes, Genesis 2:2-3 tells us: "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."

Rev. Hardison: Maybe for sabbath time, God takes a bath, too. Or plays in the ocean. Wouldn't that be fun?

Rev. Wright: I sometimes imagine that God is going to the beautiful waterfalls around the world and sitting and watching. Scripture tells us that God made the world in six days. If God worked so hard to create them, I like to imagine God delighting in beautiful waterfalls. What do you imagine God does to reset?

Rev. Hardison: Or what do you imagine God doesn't do to reset? And of course, there's Jesus. We know that Jesus also practiced sabbath rest. We know he retreated from the world regularly. And this brings us to our second scripture, which is from Luke 5:15. Jesus has just healed a man with leprosy. Luke says, "The word about Jesus had spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray."

I find that so powerful. Sometimes Jesus engages the crowds and heals people or teaches or tells stories. And sometimes he withdraws, to do his own restoration and renewal.

Rev. Wright: Jesus grew up in a Jewish society and would have known the commandment to refrain from work on the Sabbath. And Jesus would have been observing the Sabbath his whole life with his family. It was woven into the fabric of his society. Even when crowds are coming to him asking for healing, at times, he withdraws.

Rev. Hardison: And scripture often says he would withdraw to a garden or up on a mountaintop. And that he did so in order to pray. He didn't just get away, he got away to pray. Jesus modeled for us how to actively tend our spiritual life, and our relationship with God.

Rev. Wright: I also love how Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" in Matthew 11:28. Without a grounding in the Sabbath commandment, Jesus wouldn't have been able to say that. Jesus offers rest to his followers because he knows how to rest in God. Jesus intentionally cared for his own soul, for his own relationship with God.

This is a good example for all of us who find ourselves as caregivers—of kids, of parents, of spouses. We must take time to tend to our own soul and our own relationship with God. All the work that we do is ultimately God's. God invites us into God's work in the world. Yet, God tells us we can, and must, take a break.

This reminds me of the day I did nothing—really, that was the goal. I was on a mountainside in Colorado. It was part of a week-long hike with a group. Part of the task was to spend 24 hours alone in the Weminuche wilderness. If you know me, I would much rather spend the day talking to all of you rather than sit alone on a log in Colorado. Yet, with the sun high in the sky, sitting there on a log, while journaling, I spent about an hour watching a mason bee travel from flower to flower. The bee was just going about his business. It had no care in the world. My work that day in the wilderness was to delight in God's creation and to simply enjoy it. God showed me I could take 24 hours to be alone and with God. God gave me that gift. And God calls me back to that experience regularly.

We hear that God calls us to work for God's promised day in the world. Yet, the work is not solely up to us. The work is ultimately God's. We can take a break—regularly. God allows us, even commands us, to stop and rest. If God rested as part of creation, if Jesus rested as part of the healing work he did on earth, why is it so hard for us to rest?

Rev. Hardison: For many of us, it takes an illness or injury to slow us down—a crisis that forces us to stop and to change our ways. Last spring, we had a collective crisis that slowed us down: the COVID crisis and the stay-at-home orders which forced us out of our routines. Of course, some people had to work harder, and some people lost their jobs or no longer had to commute or otherwise had a forced rest. But what we also know is that as time has gone on, many people have realized that they like the slower pace. Here we are, almost a year later, in the middle of winter (and still in the middle of the pandemic) and we're inside all over again.

So, some of our staff, Sally and Brooke Brundige and myself and others, thought winter would be a perfect time to reflect on the past year and to pause and reset, together as a church family. And to remember that sabbath is a gift, and that God wants us to intentionally delight in the good things in life.

Rev. Wright: I have heard so many of you talk about the silver linings of the last year. You are realizing a shift in priorities about what is important in life. Some have realized that rest is important and you have rested more because you have time on your hands.

Some people have expressed how important family is and time with family and delighting in family through playing games, watching TV together, Zooming, etc. Some have realized that not packing the schedule allows space for family and friends and God in more meaningful ways.

Rev. Hardison: And that's where my retreat came in. I discovered that I need to slow down regularly—pandemic or no. Our 24/7 culture is so seductive. All of us need to step outside the usual pace, and the constant barrage of news and information, and actively seek God, and actively tend to our spiritual life. Last summer I walked in the woods and journaled and stared at the trees from the porch—not because I was bored, but because God was inviting me into a deeper connection. God is always inviting us there.

Ruth Haley Barton says of God's invitation, that God "waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives." So this is the image I have: that the noise and busyness is all around, and God is just beyond that. So if we can clear a path through the busyness and distractions, there's God—ready, waiting, and glad that we have finally said 'yes' to stopping and resting in God. And that's the amazing thing about sabbath time. It's a mystery. It's almost like an adventure you go on, inside yourself. If we can say 'yes' and show up, and move all that stuff out of the way, God meets us there. And what unfolds is that holy dance between God and us.

Rev. Wright: Even for those of us who are stuck in our houses or who are in healthcare facilities, sabbath is an invitation to a different intention. We can light a candle, read through the book of Psalms, or even adopt a practice of giving up worry and to lean into the trust that God will see us through. Sabbath practices are a deep well of renewal and we can even feel God drawing us beyond the busyness and distraction.

Rev. Hardison: Yes. So this is the invitation we have for you: to participate in this Holy Reset in some way. God gave us the gift of rest. All we need to do is to give ourselves the gift of rest. We have a little booklet and

a website with prayers and readings and sacred music. There are ideas and guidance, if you want it. But we intend the Holy Reset to be largely self-directed.

What is rest to you? What is work? What does your soul need right now? Even if this feels totally out of left field, or awkward, or you're afraid of not doing it right, just try one or two things. Maybe go about your day without devices and internet. See if you can pray every hour on the hour. Look out the window and see how many colors you notice, or find beauty where you didn't see it before. Maybe try doing nothing. Just see what happens. What happens in you? Where do you find holiness? Where do you find God?

Rev. Wright: From the beginning of the Holy Reset conversation, we've talked about returning to this theme regularly as a church. We can learn from each other about the ways that God is drawing us into rest from work and delight in God's creation.

Some of you might be wondering, "Today is the Super Bowl, there is no time for a reset." We have discerned that the Super Bowl can work as a sabbath practice—three hours of enjoying entertainment and largely sitting and watching TV. What would it be like to consider God sitting on the couch with you, watching the game, too? Or carve out just a few hours of sabbath today, starting with this worship service. Yet, if today is not the right day, choose a different day, a different time—one that you intentionally set aside for the purpose of rest. You may watch this worship video again, light a candle, grab your journal and sabbath another time. Whether it is today, next week, or every Friday from now on, we invite you to experience a holy reset and ask God to show you the gifts it can bring.

Rev. Hardison: We don't have to go out of town on a silent retreat to experience God's loving, holy rest. It's great if we can! But there are so many things we can do (and not do), right where we are, every single day. This is the journey upon which we invite you to embark: to rest, receive, and rejoice in the Holy Reset God intends for you. Amen.

This sermon was delivered by Rev. Melanie Hardison and Rev. Sally Wright, at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, Kansas, 66208. The sermon can be read, heard, or watched on the church's website: www.villagepres.org/online.
