

Sermon preached on Trinity Sunday at Roseville Uniting Church

18th May 2008

Rhythms of Grace: Rediscovering the Sabbath

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4

Do you remember the days when shops were closed on Sundays, when we all sat down to baked Sunday dinners, when most people went to church and church often went all day? The Sabbath was a regular part of the rhythm of the week.

There's a beautiful rhythm about the story of the Creation of the world that we find in the first chapter of Genesis.

If we had read the whole chapter we would have heard the refrain “ and then it was evening , and then it was morning the first day,the second day....and then it was evening, and then it was morning - the third day - and so on until at the end of a sixth day of productivity and creativity “*God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good. And then it was evening , and then it was morning, the sixth day.*

But then God introduced another rhythm - the rhythm of work and rest.

God had completed the work he had been doing. God rested God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on that day God rested after all his work of creating.

Judy Henderson Prather * calls the rhythm of evening and morning and of work and rest - of giving and receiving, action and reflection , speech and silence - rhythms of grace. Here in the ancient Creation story is a clue as to what will make our lives abundant and blessed. Here is something that is very important for our well-being as human beings . The Sabbath is a time set aside within the crazy busyness of our lives to put aside our work and worries and to stop and remember that God is with us. It is a “gift of grace” and it's there from the beginning of the world.

In this globalised world of mobile phones in which

- markets are always open somewhere in the world
- society tends to value us according to our productivity,
- we feel the pressure as parents to give our children the best possible start in life,

the idea of Sabbath is quite counter-cultural: Many of us might well be asking “Sabbath rest? You are joking!”

And yet can we keep this pace up? More and more we need a Sabbath for health reasons, for relationship reasons and for spiritual reasons. God made us this way..... So what is the Sabbath all about?

Firstly in the Genesis story, **the Sabbath is the climax of God’s creation**. In the creation story the Sabbath marks the time when God stopped working and like a quilt maker delighting in a finished quilt or a cabinet-maker admiring his finished table, God gazed with joy and delight at what he had made: the sun and the moon, the waters and soils and the air itself - the plants and animals and people made in God’s own image - all interconnected on this globe as it spins through the universe. The Sabbath was when God gazed at all this and saw that it was good. As some one said it is God’s cosmic “Wow!” moment.

And the Sabbath is intended to be a “wow” time for us too to enjoy the wonder of the creation of which we are a part and to enjoy fellowship with God. The Sabbath invites us into a two way communion - **God delighting in us as we give thanks for all God’s gifts**. It’s the day when we simply say “God is good” as we fall on our knees in praise and thanksgiving.

Secondly, **the Sabbath reminds us that as creatures we are dependant upon God** who is our Maker and our Provider. Some of you may know the story of the ancient Israelites in the wilderness after escaping slavery in Egypt. They were starving in the desert when God provided them with manna. Every morning there was a kind of bread for them to gather - enough for the day and on the sixth day there was twice as much so that on the Sabbath everyone could rest. Each person had enough manna for their basket regardless of their strength or age or ability and greedy gathering and hoarding was seen as not trusting in God to provide.

Thirdly, **the Sabbath offers us a vision of what God intends for the world**. It’s a vision of a community in which all God’s people and creatures live in justice and peace so that everyone has enough and is free to enjoy a sense of well-being. It’s what the Hebrews call “Shalom” .

Of course the reality of this world is too often very different but the Sabbath vision is the benchmark which inspires and calls us to right the wrongs and to transform the world towards wholeness and harmony. As Micah said:” What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.”

Fourthly **the Sabbath reminds us of the importance of our relationships**. It is about a rhythm of living that balances time for work and time for family and friends who

are very important for our well-being. In his book *Affluenza- When too much is not enough*, Clive Hamilton recounts an anecdote told to a person doing research about the impact of long hours at work on Australian families.

A Sydney merchant banker who worked very long hours was persuaded by his wife to take a day off work to spend some time with his teenage son, David. David pined for his dad's attention but he was always too busy. Nevertheless, the banker took a day off and they spent a magical day sailing. Although never repeated, David stored it in his memory as the wonderful day he spent alone with his father.

A few years later the merchant banker died suddenly of a heart attack and David, now in his twenties, found his father's diaries while going through his things. He opened one up to the date they went sailing. His father had written "Complete waste of a day".

This may be an extreme story but Daniel Petre a very successful Australian technology and media executive was so concerned about the difficulty of balancing work and family in the current working world that he wrote a book called "Father Time - Making time for your children". As a working Mum I found it very helpful too.

Sabbath is about setting aside time to attend to our relationships - not succumbing to what some call "deferred happiness syndrome" when we promise to make up for it later...when the house is paid off, after the next project..... **

Fifthly, one of the Hebrew words used in the Bible to describe God at rest is the word "Shabbat".*** It means "God ceased his labours" and returned from the time world into that state of timelessness. For us this means letting go of work and striving and goals and deadlines in order to rest.

It's about *being as well as doing* and this is important because it reminds us that as human beings and as creatures in God's creation, we are valued just for whom we are - just because we exist - not for what we do and are able to achieve.

Finally **the Sabbath is about being restoration**. Another Hebrew word that is used to describe God at rest is *Vayinafash* - This word literally means "He got his soul back". ***The Sabbath is about "**getting our soul**" back in a world that pulls us this way and that way so that we have little time to know who we really are and to attend to our soul. Actually, for Christians, the Sabbath is not the seventh day. It is the first day of the week - the day when Christ was raised from the dead - the Day of Pentecost - the day of new life and new beginnings. In other words the day of re-creation.

And so as part of the Sabbath rhythm of life - evening and morning - work and rest - giving and receiving- action and reflection - speech and silence, we add - dying and rising. In Christ we are called to die to sinful self-centredness and to all that separates

us from God and each other and to rise to new life as the life-giving Spirit of God pours love into our hearts, heals our brokenness, renews and refreshes and re-creates us , restoring our well-being in relationship with the God who made us.

Today we are invited to ask ourselves: How do we get our lives to dance to God's rhythm? **How do we reconnect with God's rhythms of grace?** How do live within that rhythm of work and rest that allows us to breathe freely and live abundantly and enjoy life as God intended. "Where do we fit Sabbath rest in our lives?"

Resources:

*" Judy Henderson Prather, *Praying with the Rhythms of Grace*", The Centre for Christian Ethics at Paylor University, 2002

** Clive Hamilton and Richard Dennis, *Affluenza: When too much is never enough*, Allen and Unwin,2005, pp. 85, 89f

*** Trisha Watts, and Gabrielle Lord, *Sanctuary: where heaven touches earth*, Willow Publishing Pty Ltd, 2005, p.170

Also Richard Lowery, *Sabbath, a "little Jubilee"* , The Centre for Christian Ethics at Baylor University2002.