

## HOLY REST

**Sermon Preached by the Rev. Dr. Lindley G. DeGarmo  
Union Church of Pocantico Hills  
October 10, 2021**

Psalm 145:8-14

Genesis 2:1-3

The creation narratives are holy and inspired verses of scripture that serve not as a science text, but as a poetic description of the truth of our lives. Last week, we looked at the creation of humanity, who having been made in the image of God were told to have dominion over all the earth. This morning we come to the seventh metaphorical day of creation when God rested from God's work. God rested not because God was tired, but to enjoy God's creation, and God hallowed this day for the good of all creation.

The sixth and seventh days of creation are intricately related, and you can't understand either day without the other one. On the sixth day we were called to work and seek dominion. On the seventh day we were called to holy rest.

Seeking dominion is not always seen as a good thing today. Dominion now has the connotation of oppression or dictatorial rule—as though the earth is ours for the plundering, but that is not the biblical understanding. All it means in Genesis is that you have been given a part of the earth to take care of. It may be as small as a college dorm room, a kitchen, or a cubicle in an office. Or it may be a position of significant leadership. Regardless of its size, that is your domain. But it is still God's garden. Your calling is to care for that part of God's garden, serving as God's co-creator, bringing light, beauty, and order into the chaos. That's a lovely job description you have, but it is not an easy one.

Morning after morning, you go out and do what you can with the little domain called your life. Maybe you are even resolved to get the garden in good order. But it is not long before you encounter resistance. Someone isn't cooperating with your creative plan for the day. For example, you may have hoped to get to work early, but your son wakes up with a sore throat and can't go to school. Now you are wondering how you are going to get to work at all. You argue with him a little bit and ask "How sore is it, really?" After burning through your entire list of sitters you finally find someone to watch him. But now you're late for work and you have missed your first appointment. So you get in another argument with your boss about being late. And that leaves you grumpy enough to start an argument with your co-worker who had nothing to do with your son's sore throat. It isn't even 10:00 a.m. and your domain has already succumbed to a chaos of arguments, and you are not exactly feeling like God's co-creator of light and beauty.

Beyond these daily frustrations, most of us maintain one or two more serious ongoing arguments through life. Some of us can't believe the hurtful turns life has taken. Something you cherish was taken away, and no matter how much you try you can't get over it. The grief over what was lost keeps reappearing. You argue with this loss: "It just isn't fair."

Others struggle to overcome the old hurts from childhood. You keep hearing those old voices: “You are not the pretty one.” “You are lazy.” “I don’t have time for you.” You work at self-esteem, but the old voices still chip away at your soul.

Still others of us, like Job, take our argument up with God. “You said I was your good creation, but do you call this good? I’ve worked hard at life. I deserve better.” And so we contend even with God. There is no shortage of arguments in this life.

I once saw two cars approaching each other on a crowded street. Automobiles were parked on either side and there was simply no room for the two approaching cars to pass. But neither was willing to back up. So they just drove up to each other’s bumpers and honked their horns. It was too perfect a metaphor for a preacher to ignore. People, organizations, unions, nations all get tired of backing up. They are fed up with losing domain, and they want what they deserve. And so the arguments continue like piercing horns. And before you know it, somebody is getting hurt. That’s how the sixth day always ends. Now we are ready for the Sabbath.

The word “Sabbath” in the Hebrew means “Give it a rest,” “Cut it out,” “Just stop it.” From the beginning we have been called periodically to stop our little arguments with life over the inadequacy of our domain long enough to remember that it is still God’s garden, that we are still creatures, that all of life is a grace, and that the last thing you should ever tell God is that you just want what you deserve. Because if that is really what you want, God will give it to you. And that is called hell. You can even make this life hell for yourself. Or you can receive glimpses of heaven, which only come by grace. On the Sabbath we are to stop fretting about our domain long enough to focus on the creative, gracious dominion of God in our lives.

Now it’s ironic, but honoring Sabbath takes work. It’s a different kind of work, though, focused not on what *we* have to do but on what *God* is doing. Spirituality isn’t easy. Neither is worship. Sometimes it seems routine and uninspiring, as sometimes all work does. Still, you have to work at paying attention to the Spirit who is moving over the chaos of your life.

Our order of worship is called a “liturgy.” Liturgy literally means *the work of the people*—the people who are now working at listening to God’s Word. This is the very hard work of being still. This means that being too busy to honor the Sabbath, or being too busy to begin your day with scripture and prayer, is actually just a way of avoiding the hard work of listening to God. Busyness can be a form of laziness. If you are going to nurture your soul, you have to engage in the work of spirituality.

You know people who have flat souls. All of the mystery and wonder and awe have been starved out of them. All that is left is their old arguments that they just keep pushing. It is the inevitable result of refusing to stand in the presence of God. From the beginning, God has been seeking us out for relationship. But you have to worship, you have to work at listening, you have to watch to see God at work in your life and the world. Honoring Sabbath is thus an act of faith, whereby we rest in the salvation Christ alone can bring.

In his classic book, *Ethics*, Aristotle claimed the only purpose of rest is to regain strength for activity. Thus, rest is a means to an end, and the end is greater work. But from its Hebrew roots the Bible has always claimed just the opposite. It is *work* that is a means to an end, and the end is Sabbath rest. Our culture has been more influenced by Greek culture than by Hebrew culture. We only think of rest as a means to get back in

there and keep at it. Sunday is just an intermission from our work, that allows to work on domestic concerns. In rejecting such blind slavery, the church longs for the Sabbath opportunity to join God in looking at the mystery of life and saying, "It is good."

Nothing is more arrogant than saying "not good enough" to what God has created and already called good. It may not look like the life you were planning, it may be scarred and still hurt. But if a risen Savior is still at work within life, it is very good.

One Saturday morning a few years ago, I was running on a popular trail in the woods outside of Baltimore. I was feeling pretty good about my run until several miles up the trail when a group of boys from one of the local cross country teams came flying by me. Their bodies were sleek and strong. They wore beautiful uniforms that looked just like those worn by Olympians. And they ran so fast that I felt like I was a lumbering garbage truck that wasn't going to make it up the hill. About the time I had recovered from this indignity, the girls' team flew by me as well, running with all of the grace of gazelles. By the time I got to the end of the trail all of the real runners were done. They were all talking to their coaches who had stop watches and clipboards. And I was maintaining a little private argument with myself that there is no such thing as a good run for me.

As I slunk away toward my car feeling inadequate, I noticed another group of runners finishing a run from the opposite direction. This group had no fancy uniforms. They wore gym shorts and T-shirts with numbers hastily scrawled on them. A few of them were running hard, but most had a clumsy pace. The crowd of runners who had passed me immediately formed on either side of these slower runners and began cheering wildly.

Curious, I walked back to the crowd and soon noticed that this group of runners were all developmentally disabled. Some of them had obvious handicaps but still they ran. They just kept going until they crossed the finished line. Eventually the kids who were just walking emerged, almost oblivious to the fact that this was a race. They wore grins that went from ear to ear as they waved to the cheering crowd. Then two girls who both had Down Syndrome appeared at the end, holding hands. They didn't even seem to understand what all the cheering was about so they just joined in the celebration by clapping their own hands.

Why were we all cheering so enthusiastically for these disabled kids? Maybe it was because we were proud of their ability not to be limited by their handicaps. Maybe. Or maybe it was because there was something in all of us, something essentially human, that connected with something more obviously human in them. Maybe we envied these kids who were free of our life arguments and who had more joy than we may ever know.

But you can know that joy. You can know a joy that bursts through all your brokenness and your disability to fix that. You just have to give your argument a rest, look up in worship, see the Savior, and hear all the saints of heaven cheering for you to keep going.

To the Lord our God, Alpha and Omega, be all glory and honor forever. Amen.