

Yes, the 10 commandments of Moses are foundational to the Jewish faith and to ours! The fourth commandment is: “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy”... This command from Moses remembers the Creation Story in Genesis 2, that on the seventh day, God “rested” from God’s work of creation. So we, like the Creator, must rest after 6 days of work; the Sabbath Day commandment says “You shall not do any work!” In other words, “take a whole day off!”

Since the Bible is the “Word” of God, it needs *definitions* of words, and *interpretations* of words! How do we define “work?” How did *they* define “work” thousands of years ago? The Torah prohibited work that included things like: Gathering sticks for a fire, lighting a fire, cooking, sewing clothes, all of which were kinds of “work,” creating or transforming something. And you could be punished severely if caught “working” on the Sabbath.

Some of the ancient Sabbath laws have carried over to modern day, especially with orthodox Jews. I sometimes attend the Saturday Sabbath worship at the local synagogue. I got there early once, and a previous (rather orthodox) rabbi, Avi, asked *me* to turn on the lights (it’s a form of “creative work,” like lighting a fire, prohibited on the Sabbath for orthodox Jews.) Rabbi Avi also used to roller skate to the synagogue on the sabbath (since cars do a creative work, the work of transforming energy into motion)... And I understand that for many Jews, meals on the sabbath should be “leftovers” or things that do not need any cooking (which we know is work!) It reminds me of the Mary/Martha story when Jesus praises Mary for sitting and talking... but somebody, Martha, had to do some food prep and clean up! It is pertinent to our own social gatherings, of course! Great to relax and chat, but somebody is always doing some “work” (prep and clean up). Jesus had a good

point, of course; there are always to do lists, projects waiting for us, but we very much need time to simply rest, chat, to simply “Be.”

While the Torah spelled out many examples of what constituted “work,” naturally we will all have our own interpretations about what is “work.” And how about the day and the timing for Sabbath rest? Many people nowadays are so busy Monday through Friday at their jobs, with Saturdays often as catch-up day for all sorts of household chores... that Sunday becomes the natural 7th or last day of the week, a day of rest, a day to sleep in, or maybe go to the beach all day! And church could seem like more “work” than rest! (the work of getting kids dressed up in Sunday best (as a kid, I wore a tie and suit jacket!), the unsettling work of interpreting strange Bible passages, even the “work” of welcoming new people when we’d rather talk mostly to the friends we already know!) I get it! When I’m on a few weeks vacation, I may skip a Sunday or two myself to sleep in, or start the day sloooooowly with pancakes!

What about work and rest on for Rabbis or for Christian Ministers? You may not think so, but it is actually quite a bit of effort to do final morning preparations, lead the worship vocally, and then try to say hello to as many people as possible, especially to newcomers. Speaking of “vocal energy,” at the risk of sharing a bit too much about myself... Last Sunday I preached with gusto, and sang a challenging song about *Real Church*, (as a love-born revolution!), I talked a lot at fellowship time, then talked (probably too much) at the meeting of architectural drawings, at the end of which I wound up hoarse! I happened to have an ENT visit this past week for sinus issues, and one of the doctor’s prescriptions was “Vocal Rest.” Through a scope, she saw inflammation and ruptured blood vessels in my vocal chords. Unbelievable! I guess I have limits and need to rest more... especially rest my *voice* more!!!

So just a *few* more words about Shabbat, or “Sabbath,” which does translate as rest, or cease working. I don’t think the day matters; For Jews, they still count Saturday as the 7th day; Christians choose Sunday for rest (as did the “blue laws” for many years). Rabbi’s rest a lot on Sundays... and Christian ministers rest a lot on *Mondays*. Also, our modern world has so much going on and we get sooo scheduled, that I think is fair to say that an entire day of “no work” seems unrealistic! Definitions of “work” aside, the spiritual meaning is “Get *regular rest*”... and surely some rest every day! When I was a YMCA camp counselor for boys about age 8 to 12, part of the daily schedule was “Everyone on your bunk bed, with no talking, for 30 minutes after lunch!” We counselors needed the quiet rest period as much or more than the children did!

A brief word on NAPS, since rest is sooo important! My mother’s mother liked to take naps, and my poor mother would get embarrassed to come home from school, perhaps with a friend, and find her mother tucked away in bed. So my mother promised herself that she would never nap, and she probably never got enough rest! The Spanish have a great word: SIESTA time... and we know that many Latin and some European countries shut down work a few hours every afternoon, then resume working later in the afternoon. I think they are very wise, so if you have a hard time reaching me some afternoon... no worries, I’ll get back to you by late afternoon or early evening, with renewed energy! Or you can just get back at me on Sunday morning, during the sermon time!

I preached a similar sermon many years ago at First Baptist Church of Needham, as assistant pastor. The senior pastor said to me afterwards, “Good sermon on rest, Ross, but you missed one important thing: What about our calling to “Rest *In The Lord*?” You may notice that Kathy chose a piece of that title for the postlude by

Mendelssohn that echoes Psalm 37 and Jesus words... for Jesus said: “Come to *me* you who labor with heavy burdens, and you will find rest for your souls (Mt. 11).

So many examples we could give for what we could call “*God Time*.” Examples from nature: Watching a sunrise with hope, listening to birds singing, watching a seedling turn into a plant with fruit or flowers, walking a beach and listening to the roar of the waves. Then there is listening to an amazing piece of music, or reading inspirational poetry, literature, or bible verses, hearing from a good old friend, forgiving another person, taking a bike ride, finding a good listener, finding someone who understands or tries to understand your situation. These can all be considered God-moments, divine moments, moments of comfort or hope or inspiration.

Suffice it to say, that we all need Sabbath times, Rest periods, especially adding openness to God, to divine Spirit. Some say, we can “get in a position” where God might speak to us. Many say that early in the morning is one of the best times to seek God. (I find that myself.) Others say that before going to sleep is good time for a short devotional reading, and to meditate on that reading. Midday, as Psalm 23 says, the Spirit of God could “lead us beside still waters” or “make us lie down in green pastures,” to restore our souls. We can make time, claim time for “God time:” for something truly restful, something beautiful, something rejuvenating that will give us “New Life,” as is promised by God, by Christ, by life in the Spirit. Amen.