

JOMO
Second Sunday in Lent
March 17, 2019
Luke 13: 10-17
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Mayflower Church

It's clearing season for Christians. It's Lent. The introspective time when we reflect on how we're doing as human beings in this living project. One young woman in the young adult Lenten group said: "It's my favorite time of the year."

And we do this at Mayflower in community, each year a different focus. We reflect on our relationship with time, or with money, with "the other", with our true self, with the earth, with our body, and this year, we are reflecting on our relationship with tech, with our devices; so that we may be wide awake and make some changes in our personal use; so that we can choose our life rather than having big tech choose it for us. Often, usually, always good Lenten reflection and practice leads us to be counter culture... That's where real life is and that's why we were born in the first place to live in this counter culture, God centered way and that's why, on our death bed, we'll have few regrets... We Christians fall in love with our Jesus path all over again... We remember all the many gifts this, our wisdom way, offers us... We rediscover these gifts in Lent and exclaim anew oh yes, by God, oh yes thank you. The human soul is beautiful and we want to tend to it and Lent is the time.

Sabbath is one of these gifts of the Jesus path. I want for you and for me so, so, so, so much a Sabbath practice. And that it not be a fad, but rather an anchor in life, from here on out. Sabbath time may be 24 hours, 12 hours, 6 hours a week, but be careful not to make it too short. Wayne Mueller in his book [Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight In Our Busy Lives](#) writes: "Sabbath honors the wisdom of dormancy. Like plants, we too must have a period in which we lie fallow and restore our souls. In Sabbath time we remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred... We let our work, our lands, lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary of time, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time." I want so much for you to have Sabbath time built regularly and unassailably into your life that I'm considering doing an altar call right here and now. But I don't know how to do it or even really what it is...The point is: How do we get ourselves to commit, publically, privately, it doesn't matter but to commit to Sabbath time?! I want it for you and for me and for our children so, so, so, so, so, so, so, so much!

Now, some of us may come from a more conservative religious background and the word Sabbath feels like punishment. As a child it was a rigid thing. You remember a beautiful wintry day, the perfect snow, and the hill over there just beckoning to you, but you couldn't go sledding. You had to sit still.

Some of us may come from a completely non-religious background in which there is no ancient wisdom passed down from generation to generation about how to live in time, no religious seasons that shape how you perceive reality, no weekly rhythm for the soul; and so your family created their own relationship to time or left it up to society.

Some of us come from a theologically liberal Christian background that vaguely shaped us with the religious seasons but mostly we were so concerned about religious over reach and fundamentalism and intellectual freedom that we either abandoned the word Sabbath all together or it was so flexible and vague that it meant almost nothing.

But there is a newer movement now among many theologically liberal, progressive Christians. Our beliefs remain non-creedal, mostly metaphorical; we are at ease and delight in mystery. But our practices are becoming clearer and we're no longer afraid of the words "spiritual discipline". Like our ancestors in the liberal faith, there is no need to believe that Jesus is the only true way, we completely honor other religions, but we are rediscovering that the Jesus way for us, is so very good, salvific even.... It's not about how we think about Jesus-- was he God, the son of God, a human filled with God consciousness, a messenger of God, an archetype of humanity?--There is no litmus test about right belief. But rather it's about what he taught, or what the story says he taught... about how to live... with compassion, justice, forgiveness, welcoming the stranger, prayer, Sabbath, joy Just as many indigenous people are coming back to their ancestors' way of living, and Jews coming back to Jewish practice, Christians are coming back not to rigid belief but to the Jesus path, a way of living, a community of practice...

Now about the practice of Sabbath... You may be thinking, based on the bible story today that Jesus didn't value it. That he even dispenses with Sabbath. mmm.mmm

Jesus was a Jew from the moment he was born to the moment he died. Sabbath practice was bred in his bones and he never left it. It is at the heart of the Creation story. Desmond Tutu writes: "And on the seventh day, God laughed, and rested, and enjoyed God's glorious creation." Sabbath rest, a part of the essential rhythm of ongoing creation. It is also one of the Ten Commandments. "Observe the Sabbath (Deut 5:13) day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt." Sabbath is so the worker, the servant, the animal, the land, can have rest: It's essential to a just economy. Jesus didn't question the authority of this Sabbath practice. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath to worship. What he questioned, it seems to me, was how it evolved into a kind of unthinking, punitive, rigid discipline. He says: If my friends are famished and we are walking past a wheat field, of course we will pluck the grain and eat it. If the person in front

of me is hurting or ill, and I can help them, of course I will do so. This eating and healing is in keeping with Sabbath practice, just like children enjoying the freshly snow covered hill on their sleds is in keeping with Sabbath.

But it is a slippery slope, this not being rigid but also not being overly flexible so it doesn't mean anything. I have sympathy for the other religious leaders in the story. I probably would have challenged Jesus too, wanting him to clarify his position, concerned that people might interpret his words as being overly dismissive of the Sabbath. And I have sympathy for Jesus that he couldn't not heal the hurting person in front of him. Maybe this arguing and discussing theology is a good thing to have modeled in our scripture. So, about Sabbath: On the one hand, let's not be too rigid. Use your common sense, if there is an emergency. On the other hand, if we are not disciplined and rigorous we will lose out on this gift from God. The universe is saying to us: "Unplug from the machine for a while and rest. The world won't fall apart."

So, here's the million dollar question, as many of us are committing to a Lenten practice this year of giving up or limiting screen time. If you have a smart phone, how *do* you practice Sabbath? How do you take a day or a nice chunk of a day each week without checking or using your smart phone? Is it possible to use the technology to help you limit your use of the technology? Is there an app that can easily shut down everything save the function of reaching or being able to be reached by loved ones? Or do you have to put it in away for your Sabbath time? This is no small matter! What happens if we don't figure out how to do this in our life, unplug from the machine for a good chunk of time every week? What's at stake for the soul? If we don't choose this Sabbath practice which is at the heart of every religious tradition, a time for rest and effortless enjoyment, what will happen to our humanity?

Speaking of Sabbath practice, what about smart phones in church? Some of us, this Lent are leaving our smart phone at home or stashed in the car. Are you hearing the buzz about this issue of smart phones in church? Let me share a few things observed or heard at Mayflower during this first week of Lent. One of you asked to use the land line in the office last Sunday because you had intentionally left your smart phone behind and you needed a ride home. We laughed about how old school this seemed and that it felt just fine. Another one of you observed, while walking into one of our Sunday school classrooms at the beginning of class last Sunday that "every single kid was on their smart phone." Another shared this: "Our Lenten commitment is to not look at our phones or computers from 6:00am to 6pm on Sundays." In our Young adult Lenten group on Wednesday evening-- they've let me join this year because I'm feeling particularly young at heart-- we wondered together about whether we should make the Fireside room a smart phone free space. "When people are reading a book" one person said, "at least you can ask what they are reading and make conversation." Another noted that at the school where she works kids are not allowed to bring their smart phones, then pointing out something at church I hadn't even noticed, the big sign on the door to the CE wing that says

“please pocket your smart phone.” It’s meant for the week day early childhood center but who knows, maybe? And we talked about how, on Mayflower youth trips, kids are not allowed to bring their phones.

Lots of questions are being raised this Lent. What’s at stake for us as a church community? What would happen if smart phones became ubiquitous in church on Sunday morning? What would happen to worship, that mysterious shaping of our souls through silence, togetherness, music, story, ritual, breath, present moment mindfulness, even boredom....? What would happen to community, the mysterious weaving of a sense of belonging through simply being present in silence or one thread of conversation, even small talk, at a time? We, as a community, are reflecting on this because we refuse to take the path of least resistance and just shrug our shoulders and say “it’s just the way things are”. We are choosing our life together as a community and not letting big tech choose it for us.

I remember exactly where I was the first time I heard the expression FOMO. Fear of missing out. I was taking a walk with a childhood friend on our gravel road up at the cabin several years ago. Both of us having grown up coming to this place for one month every summer. Most of the families in this community lived the other 11 months in a parsonage. Our dads were ministers. We’d been coming up to this place since we were babies and now raising our own children with this summer tradition. She is a teacher now, this friend of mine, with entire summers free and she was telling me about how much she wanted to bring her children up to the cabin all summer like my husband did, who was also an educator and had summers off. My daughters would move to the cabin with their dad all summer, leaving the day after school was out. (I would join them for my month vacation.) What she said next surprised me. She said that new technology was making this really hard for her. She said FOMO was keeping her kids from wanting to be at the cabin all summer because they could see, constantly, in real time, everything that they were missing out on back home. I realized, all of a sudden, how lucky we were that our kids were older. Just those five years made all the difference in terms of this fast developing technology. Our daughters never experienced, through the immediacy of this technology, FOMO when they were young. Consequently, they speak of the cabin in the woods as their most sacred place on earth and that quality of time as something they are always searching for.... that Sabbath time when they would just let the world go by, waste hours and hours doing nothing, or playing, or reading, or talking to the neighbors, or just lying on the swinging bed, loafing and inviting their soul... Even the quality of the boredom felt good somehow...We didn’t have this expression at the time, but now it seems just right. JOMO. The Joy of missing out...

May we all, especially our children, enjoy the wonderful rhythm of life that God intends for us. Lots of time for connection and productivity and creativity and being a part of the world! *And some time* to put it all away and just rest and enjoy and be unproductive, uninformed, disconnected. JOMO for everyone!