

“Sabbath in the Stewardship of Ourselves”

John 10: 9-11; Psalm 46

August 26, 2007

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Stewardship is a word that is not well understood – it’s a word that gets a lot of play in the fall of each year when the church launches its fall “stewardship” campaign. What does stewardship mean?

A steward is a person who manages the affairs of a household or an estate for the owner.

He or she is a caretaker of some kind or another – a person who takes care of money, real estate, or the stateroom of a cruise ship.

In the Christian sense a steward is the manager of the affairs of God on earth.

God calls each one of us to be stewards and has given each one of us abilities and talents that are unique and God calls us to use those abilities and gifts to serve him and his kingdom.

Everything we have has been given to us by God – our time, talents, health, property, our relationships, and the environment – everything!

God has given all these gifts freely to us and as Christian stewards we are called to serve God out of love and gratitude for all His gifts, we are called to serve especially in response to the greatest gift of all - his son, Jesus Christ.

One verse of scripture that has stuck with me from my childhood days is John 10:10 when Jesus says:

“I came that you might have life, and have that life abundantly”

As God’s children we have been given, through Jesus Christ, abundant life and as God’s stewards we are called to serve Him out of love and gratitude for that abundant life.

Use your gifts – your time, your talent, your treasure – everything to glorify and to enjoy Him forever!

I Peter 4:10 states that:

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts each of you has received.”

In Sabbath time – we are called to take time to rest and relax to renew our spirits – we are called to be still

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10)

Time is needed to pursue a higher calling and that time often gets gobbled up by a host of worthwhile activities.

There is work to do, books to read, people to help, prayers to pray, mountains to climb, seas to sail, good deeds to be done. And regrettably the good is often the enemy of the best.

How often have you heard yourself or others say, “I need to simplify my life!”

The process of letting go and letting God in involves not only clearing our cluttered space, but also dealing with our cluttered schedules, cluttered thoughts and cluttered spirits.

It keeps occurring to me as I observe my own life and the lives of others that we often miss the kingdom, rush right past the abundant life, and put our own lives in jeopardy because we live such hurried, noisy lives. “I am so busy, I just can’t seem to get anything done...there are not enough hours in the day.”

Does the follow sound at all familiar?

The other day I decide to water my garden.

As I turn on the hose in the driveway, I look over at my car and decide my car needs washing.

As I start toward the garage, I notice that there is mail on the porch table that I brought up from the mailbox earlier.

I decide to go through the mail before I wash the car.

I lay my car keys down on the table, put the junk mail in the garbage can under the table, and notice that the can is full.

So, I decide to put the bills back on the table and take out the garbage first.

But then I think, since I'm going to be near the mailbox, when I take out the garbage anyway, I may as well pay the bills first.

I take my checkbook off the table, and see that there is only 1 check left. My extra checks are in my desk in the study, so I go inside the house to my desk where I find the can of Coke that I had been drinking.

I see that the Coke is getting warm, and I decide I should put it in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

As I head toward the kitchen with the Coke, a vase of flowers on the counter catches my eye--they need to be watered.

I set the Coke down on the counter, and I discover my reading glasses that I've been searching for all morning.

I decide I better put them back on my desk, but first I'm going to water the flowers.

I set the glasses back down on the counter, fill a container with water and suddenly I spot the TV remote someone left it on the kitchen table.

I realize that tonight when we go to watch TV, I will be looking for the remote, but I won't remember that it's on the kitchen table, so I decide to put it back in the den where it belongs, but first I'll water the flowers.

I pour some water in the flowers, but quite a bit of it spills on the floor. So, I set the remote back down on the table, get some towels and wipe up the spill.

Then, I head down the hall trying to remember what I was planning to do.

At the end of the day:

the car isn't washed,
the bills aren't paid,

there is a warm can of Coke sitting on the counter,
the flowers don't have enough water,
there is still only 1 check in my check book,
I can't find the remote,
I can't find my glasses,
and I don't remember what I did with the car keys.

Then, when I try to figure out why nothing got done today, I'm really baffled because I know I was busy all day long, and I'm really tired.

P.S. I just remembered – I LEFT THE WATER RUNNING IN THE DRIVEWAY!

“Be still and know that I am God,” says Psalm 46:10. It doesn't say, read another book and you'll know, tackle another worthy project and you'll know, it says be still – silent, motionless, uncluttered.

In the Hebrew tradition, petitionary prayer is discouraged during Sabbath time. We are to focus our heart not on what we need, but rather on what we have.

When we are attentive and awake,

A single breath can fill us to overflowing. The touch of a loved one, a particular angle of the sunlight can bring delight to our hearts; the simple gesture of someone's hand resting on our own; a taste of rich dark chocolate, or a familiar tune or melody can all give birth to a quiet satisfaction, a sense of enough.

The idea of stewardship connects to an underlying question: How do the decisions one makes about how to live influence what one has to give back to God's world?

Increasingly, we Americans seem to be paying attention to environmental issues, partly as a result of growing concern about global warming and energy costs.

Many people are beginning conversations about “voluntary simplicity” or sustainable living — conversations including everything from how to cut back on energy use and live a “greener” lifestyle, to whether the benefits derived from having a fast-paced, all-consuming career are worth the costs.

Some people have become advocates for scaling back, for owning smaller houses and less stuff, for spending more time with family and friends, for finding work that satisfies the soul as well as pays the mortgage.

The Stewardship of Ourselves in the Sabbath encourages us to simplify our life by not seeking another thing. As we do this we are rewarded with a strong sense of inner peace that comes directly from knowing that we are here as a guest who is always being provided for – we then can trade striving for arriving.

Just allow yourself to meld in the perfection of the universe that you live in – you don't need another thing to be happy; it is all being provided for you right here – right now.

Take time to let go and let God in. Let go of striving – be still – let God in by realizing that you already have everything that you need to be peaceful, happy and content. Relax into that knowing – affirm it again and again – I am letting go and letting God into my heart and my soul.

“Be still and know that I am God”

Listen to T.S. Elliot's poem “Ash Wednesday”

“Because I know that time is always time
And place is always place and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are...”

The Stewardship of Ourselves in the Sabbath means we rejoice in things as they are – we rejoice in the stillness of:

- The dawn slowly illuminating the dark without rushing

- The cats curled up, sleeping on the deck – basking in the sun
- The tide comfortably coming in and out without judgment

Everything we see, touch, or own is a gift from God; The Stewardship of Ourselves in the Sabbath helps us suspend our ego and seek an attitude of gratitude and generosity for the abundant life God has provided.

As we walk in God’s path we become more like Jesus living our lives in a state of unlimited giving.

“I came that you might have life and have that life abundantly.” (John 10: 10)

The poem by Hafiz (a Persian mystic poet who lived in the 1300’s) bears repeating here:

Even after all this time
The sun never says to the earth,
“You owe me”

Look what happens?
With a love like that
It lights the whole sky

The Stewardship of Ourselves in the Sabbath is giving without keeping an account or expecting something in return.

Keeping the Sabbath means that we spend some time at the close of each day contemplating these kinds of questions:

- What touched or moved me today?
- Where did I experience God’s spirit and presence today?
- What did I learn about God and myself today?

As we have spent this summer thinking about, experiencing, and enjoying Sabbath time – time to rest, to do nothing, to be still in the midst of our busy lives, may we continue finding Sabbath time all year round?

The Stewardship of Ourselves in the Sabbath means that we simplify our lives, we slow down, we rejoice in things as they are, we let go, and we let God in. As we are able to do these things, we will find ourselves living our lives with:

- Less worry
- Less striving
- Less judgment
- Less guilt
- More cooperation
- More appreciation of beauty
- More comfort with Mystery
- More acceptance of self and others
- More ability to live in the moment
- More forgiveness
- More aliveness
- More capacity to listen
- More kindness
- More compassion
- More trust
- More gratitude
- More generosity

“Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
in every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul:”

“I came that you might have life, and have that life abundantly” – John 10:10

“Be still and know that I am God” – Psalm 46:10