

How often do we can get so wound up by little things that we miss what is more important? For instance, a family finally has a reunion, and someone complains about a stain on the tablecloth. I remember one of my kids having a math question marked wrong even though the answer was correct, simply because they used a different method of figuring the answer out than the textbook suggested. Such moments knock the wind out of our sails for sure! They miss the greater joy for a moment of becoming the center of attention.

Our Gospel is about a crippled woman Jesus healed on the day of rest. Can you imagine how she felt when for the first time in her life she felt free but was surrounded by complaints that Jesus picked the wrong day to do good? She was ready to celebrate, but those whose job it was to proclaim her return to a healthy condition found ways to rain on her parade. Jesus was constantly condemned by experts as people like this woman had to endure humiliation rather than joy.

We likewise find it difficult to affirm the right choices of someone else because they are of a different political party, nationality, or aren't part of our inner circle. We all do it without even thinking. On this day in question, self-appointed religious experts were hoping to find a reason to destroy Jesus' credibility. A poor woman was caught in the crossfire when they shouted that Jesus should have waited another few hours to heal her. They were so proud of how religious they were they were willing to steal her first true Sabbath and make her wait!

She was so crippled and bent she couldn't lift her head to see anyone face to face. No matter, she faithfully showed up for worship and for the first time ever Jesus gave her the ability to lift her hands and eyes to the heavens in prayer. And all she heard in response was the anger, bitterness, catcalls, and criticism of Jesus for daring to share love and healing on a holy day.

Sabbath rest was a gift at Sinai so Israel would always remember to keep life focused on God. It was a time of holy rest to renew the daily commitment to keep God first in every moment of life. But from the time of Moses religious teachers had debated about what keeping the Sabbath meant (and it continues today.) They said: No cooking, but you can rescue your animal from a ditch. No traveling but it is OK to walk less than a hundred yards. No dancing but you could condemn someone for how they prayed. There were thousands of exemptions, clarifications and excuses permitted, but when a crippled woman was healed someone complained Jesus wasn't following their playbook.

Hundreds of years earlier Isaiah had complained too many were tied down by obligations rather than freed by love. He used the image of a yoke which ties oxen together as a team to lighten a load so that they can accomplish more together than apart. These Pharisees had taken the aspects of the law, like how to observe the Sabbath and turned them into a yoke that tied people to impossible obligations that held them back and down.

Talk about raining on a parade – not only did they miss the miracle but couldn't even praise God for changing this woman's life. It is complicated for any of us to keep the Sabbath, as it means giving up what we do best, whether it is worry, control, or sweat and toil. The real effort is not what we can't do, but how can we let go of earthly stuff and reflect upon and celebrate the power of God's love? Is that not what keeping the Sabbath (a day of rest) is all about?

The command to keep the Sabbath was a command to keep God first, rest in his presence, and affirm the miracles of his creation. When we back away from our daily endeavors we are more likely to rejoice and celebrate in what God has done. And, as God becomes our focus, our own brokenness fades away like a crippling illness that has been healed. That is true worship. That is holy rest. In taking time to surrender our thoughts and fears, God's presence can become the passion and energy of living. Real worship is what happens every day!

A crippled woman had been kept from normal worship. She couldn't go through the proper motions because her body held her back. And yet, even that didn't prevent her from keeping priorities straight. The leaders obsessed with laws which crippled their ability to love. This healing offered the woman her first real Sabbath rest. No longer did her body work against itself. She was free to pray without constraint or restriction. She was free but the leaders were crippled.

Like a Samaritan who wasn't bound by the law and helped a wounded traveler, Jesus allowed his body to be broken, nailed to wood, and it became crippled to the point of death. He was not the kind of Messiah everyone expected, but instead embraced our crooked lives and showed the reality from which none of us can escape. He yoked himself to a load we couldn't escape, so that he could set us free. When he emerged on Easter, completely rested, whole and alive again, he offered to all the opportunity to have our own crippled natures healed and the potential of our living restored. And a new Sabbath was born!

When Jesus laid his hands on that broken woman, she was healed and set free. And in our surrender to him, by faith, his loving touch sends us with the same good news: Forgiven, healed, restored not by keeping any rules or laws or maintaining a tradition but because of his love and his love alone.

When we learn Sabbath rest, we are practicing so that in every day we might find the same peaceful rest in God's loving arms. "Remembering the Sabbath" is not about checking off one hour of the week as religious and ignoring God the rest of the time but making a habit of remembering God so that every moment is filled with the peace that only God can bring.

Even Christians can differ with each other about everything under the sun, but when we learn the value of Sabbath rest (whether it is one day or everyday) we begin to see every part of living through God's love rather than our selfishness. God's first rule was the Lord your God is One, and Him only shall you serve. When that is our beginning, everything falls into place. As we remember whose we are, we remember how to live. That is true worship. And it comes from finding time for holy rest, or in other words, remembering the Sabbath

This is our opportunity to feel Jesus' healing embrace. To take a time out from our struggles. In Jesus' perfect three-day sabbath in the tomb, we are refreshed and renewed in a special way, so we might begin to remember his love surrounds and heals us each and every day. The key is to find more such holy rests not just for an hour on Sunday but in every moment of every day!

It is easier to ignore a bruised apple than consider a little work might provide applesauce. It is more fun to point out someone else's weakness than to offer them a little assistance or help. It is easier to rationalize my own decisions than to affirm those of someone who might have a

different approach. If we are to love at all we must learn to love all. If we are willing to celebrate God in our life, we must allow God to teach us how to live our lives. Proper rest allows us to gain the strength, guidance, and passion for that to happen. And such rest comes under the heading of sabbath rest.

That is why this rest is holy, and that is how this rest is a practice every week for what happens every day! The Sabbath is more than an obligation or a day, it is a new lifestyle that keeps us focused and fills us with peace. Best of all the Sabbath is how Jesus' heals the crippled and sets all prisoners free. It is our gift of a special time of rest. And such rest results in a special kind of peace.