

Practising Sabbath
A sermon preached at Burlington Baptist Church
Based on *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor
Sunday, June 11, 2017
Bert Radford

Remember the old days of Sunday rest. You could go to church and Sunday school, read, take a walk, but that was about it. You could not ride a bike, swim, play games or go to sports. The Sunday schedule in my house was rigorous:

Morning: Sunday School and Church

Afternoon: Church in my Father's second church,

Evening: Church again, back at the first church.

It was not only Christians who observed the Sabbath. Sunday Blue Laws kept everything closed so church was the only option. Barbara Brown Taylor remembers growing up in Georgia where "they made Sabbath practice easier by not offering any alternatives". Canada was the same. Do you remember Sunday midnight movies? They started at 20:01 A.M. Monday morning to avoid Sunday. When I was thirteen my brother took me to one and I felt very grown up.

By 1960 it had all changed. Television brought Sunday sports and movies into our homes and The Ed Sullivan Show out-drew evening services. The church no longer had a monopoly on the Sabbath Day. If you believe in equality and human rights you cannot mourn the loss of those Christian dominated Sundays in a culture of many faiths. We have lost a lot of the rules around the Sabbath but I hope we have not lost the practice of it. The principal of rest and meditation is a very important in this age of action heroes.

Ours is a culture of constant activity; electronic mail demands instant response; cell phones ever with us. You can take a night's work home with you in your vest pocket. We are all action heroes. More output is demanded on the job; less time is offered. We must say yes. Our self-esteem gets caught up in it. If we do not say "Yes" to every demand we are diminished. Taylor points out that, "the ability to do many things at high speed is the mark of a successful person. As much as most of us complain about having too much to do, we harbor some pride that we are in such demand."

When welcoming the Sabbath on Friday evening, Jews light two candles. They are based on the two different editions of the Ten Commandments in the Scripture.

The first Sabbath Candle is based on the Exodus edition of the Ten Commandments In which, during creation, God rested on the seventh day and blessed and hallowed it as a day of rest. Sabbath is a day of rest from work. It was a command to all, rich and poor, labourer and leader. All must rest on the Sabbath.

The second Sabbath Candle looks back to the version in Deuteronomy in which the Sabbath is based on God leading the people out of slavery. "Remember you were a slave in Egypt... God brought you out and commanded you to keep the sabbath Day."

The Sabbath began with emancipation from slave labour. It is all about freedom from work, and from the boss's demands. It's about freedom of choice. You can decide what you will do with the Sabbath.

But Sunday is a busy day. There are jobs at church, the demands of family, sports for the kids. The Sabbath rest is lost in busyness. We need to practise pop-up Sabbaths. We have pop-up stores, pop-up patios, pop-up meetings. Why not "Pop up Sabbaths"? The Bible says

simply, "Be still and know that I am God." We don't need to wait for Sunday to pause and be quiet. There are many places and times for the Sabbath. A moment on your balcony, a walk through a park, driving in your car

You can shut off the 100 tasks and problems and open your mind to God. The sign to a rest area you pass on the highway is really a welcome to a Sabbath. Pull off, pull up in the shade and rest for just a while.

Practising the Sabbath: -

 you have permission to rest,
 you have been set free,
 God will speak.

And it can happen anywhere, anytime, in the quiet of your own soul.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen