

# *“The Gift of Simply Being”*

October 7th, 2018

*Deuteronomy 5: 12-15 & Colossians 3: 12-17*

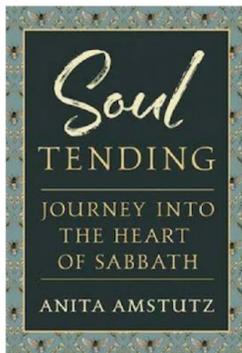
Rev. Dr. Alan Bennett  
Wall Street United Church

*“Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.”*

I think that the 4th commandment is one of the best reasons to be thankful on this Thanksgiving Sunday. The idea of setting apart one day a week to rest was an amazing gift that the Hebrew people gave to the world. Most ancient peoples had no weekly day off. The idea never occurred to them. You worked until the work was done – which of course it never is. The Hebrews were different.

Right now, in our present day, we are part of an incredibly busy, stressful, technology-driven society. It doesn't matter if you don't like it – you're in it. We all are – which is why, more than ever, we need at least one day a week to stop, seek peace and find some kind of re-creation. What the fourth commandment (or recommendation – they really were more recommendations than commands) tells us is that to have a healthy life, we need to set apart at least a seventh of our time and get off the treadmill and just be ourselves – just enjoy life. It tells us that life is more, far more, than achieving and performing. Life is not simply one long desperate quest for more of everything. Not to know this, is to misunderstand your life's purpose.

A woman by the name of Anita Amstutz, a Mennonite Christian, has written a book called “Soul Tending: A Journey into the Heart of the Sabbath.”



She maintains that the Sabbath is one of the most important gifts given by God in the Bible. The word Sabbath literally means, “to stop, to cease, to end, to rest.” Traditionally the Sabbath begins at sundown on

Friday and lasts until the first three stars appear in the sky on Saturday evening. I like that. When is the last time you looked for the first three stars to appear on any evening? Isn't looking up at the stars quite magical? It always does something to our souls.

One of the key things behind the Sabbath concept is that we don't have to be "doing something" to be worthy. That is easy to say, but runs totally against what our society believes. The truth is we are defined by what we do, and instinctively we're afraid of doing nothing.

I love reading books – especially novels. I always have two or three on the go. But I have a serious problem. I can never find the time to relax and sit and read. Why not? Well, for me something that is a pleasure (like relaxing and reading) always has to wait until all work-related things are done. I was raised with a nose-to-the-grindstone ethic. Get your work done! Do not put off until tomorrow something that should be done today! Study hard! Work hard! The opposite was called 'lollygagging' by my father. Has anyone else here ever been told to 'stop lollygagging and get to work?' "Don't be a lollygagger!" [The word was a question on Jeopardy this week!]

In our world today if we don't have a job we feel almost ashamed. It's one of the huge problems with having a disability. When asked, "What do you do?" it doesn't feel at all good to say, "I don't do anything." It is even a serious problem in retirement. Who am I now? Do I have value anymore? Is my task now just to wait until I die? Well, the concept behind a Sabbath calls us to stop doing, acquiring, or making, and instead just be ourselves and receive the Creator's good gifts. It's a time for your body to heal and your soul to relax.

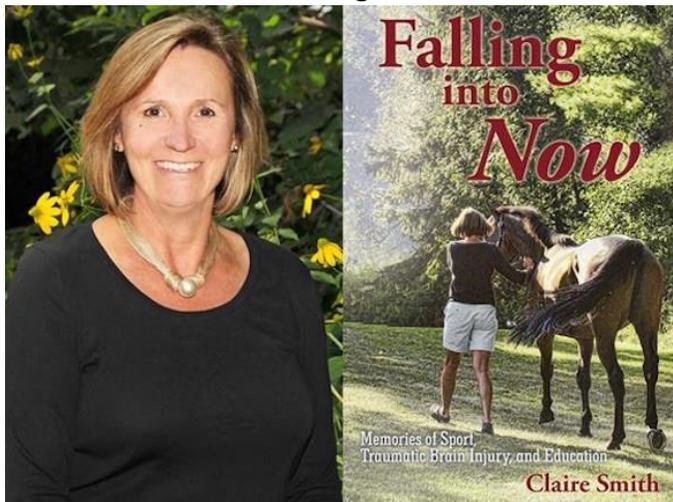
So how might you "keep" or practice the Sabbath? Well Anita Amstutz turns off all her electronic devices – her iPhone, her iPad, her iPod, even her TV. I suspect that even suggesting this might cause some of us to blanch, have withdrawal symptoms, start shaking and go into shock.

It's rather like the story of a friend of mine who got up one Saturday morning only to discover that the power was off. It had gone off during the night. This meant that his Laptop, TV, DVD, Wi-Fi and iPod – the one with the new surround sound music system – were all out of action. Without power none of them would work. He tried to call Ontario Hydro but discovered that he had forgotten to charge his iPhone the night before. It was flat – out of battery. He didn't have a landline. Only oldies do now. To top it all off, it was pouring rain outside; he couldn't even go for a walk! Totally miserable, he went into the kitchen to make himself a coffee, only to realize that coffeemakers also use power. So with nothing else to do, he ended up sitting on the couch in the living room for two hours talking to his

wife. The next day in his surprised email to me he said, “You know, she seems like a nice person!”

So, what about you? Where does all this leave you? Anita Amstutz suggests that we spend our Sundays with family and friends. She suggests doing something different, like going for a walk, riding a bike, reading a book, reflecting, even – or going to Church. Find a rhythm, she says, that is different from your regular weekly routine. Do things that give renewal and refreshment.

I want to close by telling you about a local woman I heard speak a couple of weeks ago. Her name is Claire Smith. Her recently published book is called, “Falling into Now.”



A few years ago Claire was an accomplished Equestrian – so accomplished that she competed all over the world. She was a member of the Canadian Olympic Equestrian team. In the equestrian world Claire was known, admired, and respected. It was on September 13, 1997, in Burghley, England, that her life changed forever.

She was riding her horse, Gordon, on a Cross Country Steeplechase. It was a difficult, tricky course done at a fast gallop, jumping over eight different types of fences. It was the fifth jump that seemed to confuse Gordon. From the previous jump there were but a couple of strides to a very narrow fence. Confused and unable to figure it out, Gordon launched himself into the air, without his usual classic jumping form. His front legs caught the fence and he, with Claire Smith on his back, somersaulted over the jump.

The next chapter in Claire’s book is called “Chaos.” Gordon had fallen on top of her. At the age of 34 Claire Smith’s equestrian days ended in a split second. She was left with Traumatic Brain Injury - T.B.I. – apparently all too common in equestrian injuries.

Claire has no memory of anything for the next 6 months. A whole part of her memory was just erased. Today her brain functioning is back, but she has limited mobility and uses a wheelchair to get around.

The question facing this young woman was – “Now who am I?” Her entire life from the time she was a very young girl centred on horses and

competitive riding. She was one of the very best in the world – at the peak of her career one moment, and unable to even ride the next.

I am aware that there are a few people in this Church who know what this feels like. Maybe you are one. Most of us have never had to go there. When everything that gives life meaning and purpose to you is suddenly taken away – the question you are left with is – Who am I? What will I be now?

It has taken Claire Smith twenty years to try and sort this out. In time she went back to university and took her Master's degree in Psychology at Ottawa University. She enjoyed being a student so much that she went on to get her PhD. Today she is a published author and sought-after speaker. She swims almost daily at the Y here in Brockville.

But that is not what gives Claire Smith her immense value. And it wasn't being an accomplished equestrian either. Who am I? Who was I? What will I be? The same three questions are asked by all of us. The answer implicit in the 4th Commandment is this – “You are a child of God.” That is what gives you immense value. It is the spark of the divine within you (and believe me it is there) that makes you unique and really quite wonderful. Sometimes it flickers and grows dim. At other times it flames brightly and you feel close to God. It never ever goes out.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday 2018 remember that no one can make you thankful but you. And the best way to do that is to accept the gift of simply being you. God made you. God loves you. God intends you to be the best you that you can be. So...“Happy Thanksgiving!”

Amen