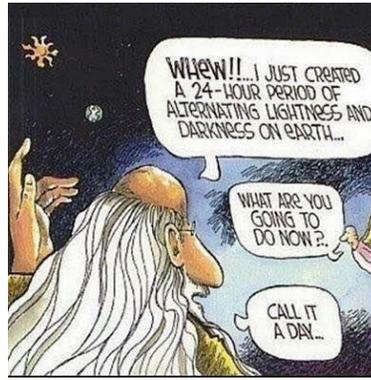


“Labour and Leisure”

September 1, 2019
Genesis 1 and 2

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This is the Labour Day weekend. Most of us associate Labour Day with the end of Summer, the return to school, and going back to our regular routine. But of course, as the name suggests, Labour Day is a celebration of the workforce. It is an acknowledgement of how the labour union movement helped to improve the lives of workers. In Canada we have been celebrating Labour Day since the 1880's.

And linked to this day was the struggle for the 8 hour work day. In the mid 1700's and through the 1800's, with the Industrial Revolution, 10-16 hour work days were common, and this was for 6 days a week. Child labour was a common part of the picture too. With the Industrial Revolution, the factories had an insatiable thirst for workers, and they had very few rights.

In the late 1800's the mantra of the labour union movement became: "*Eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest.*" They understood that those who were profiting from the workers would never set reasonable limits on their work load, so they fought through strikes and negotiations to make working conditions better. Sometimes unions today get a bad rap. Maybe at times it's deserved ... I don't know. I do know that we all benefited from the sacrifices and struggles of unions in the past, and that we should be grateful for them.

During the time of Christendom, the one day of the week you could count on being a day off in Europe and North America was of course Sunday: the Lord's Day.

We have all sorts of wonderful history in our archives here at the church, including the book of minutes from the Brockville Ministerial from 1926-1933. I brought it to the present-day ministerial association (that's the meeting of ministers in Brockville from all different denominations). In it there is a letter they had received from the 'Canada Foundries & Forgings, Ltd. James Smart Plant'.

The letter was a response to a letter the Ministerial Association had written to the factory about operating on a Sunday being in violation of the Lord's Day Act. The letter admits that on one or two occasions a department had indeed been in operation on a Sunday. The Superintendent, H. Tetlaw, writes: "*I have now given instructions, that, should it be necessary to operate this department to such an extent, work must not commence until after Sunday midnight; by this means, I believe we shall be obeying the law. You can rest assured that no work will be performed in our Plant on Sundays. Yours very Truly*". I'm trying to imagine the present-day ministerial writing a letter to 3M about their operations and being taken seriously!

Do you remember a time when things were not open on Sundays? Most of you do. I remember having a big debate in high school about it ... yes, I am that old! While the other side argued that people should have a right to shop any day they like, we on the opposition argued that this meant people would be forced to work on Sundays, leaving no one day when families and the community could rest and gather together. I can't remember who won the debate, but we certainly know which side won the overall argument.

Now I know we do not live in a Christian society anymore and I'm ok with that. There are different faith traditions and different holidays, and that is ok. But I do lament that our society seems to never shut off anymore. We are a 24/7 world. Part of it is how high tech everything is. When I go home the work doesn't end, because I carry a phone with me that flashes when there is a new message or email.

But 24/7 is not part of God's plan for the world. In the beginning, right in the heart of the Creation story, we have the institution of the Sabbath—the day of rest.

In the Creation story, God takes 6 days to create the earth and all the creatures on the earth and to create human beings. And then on the 7th day, God rests.

I always thought that was a little bit funny that God rests because I didn't think God could get tired. Isaiah 40 tells us: "*The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.*"

Clearly God does not rest because of exhaustion or weariness or because he has to. So why the 7th day, and what does it mean for us?

First of all, this establishes but also acknowledges the pattern and the rhythm of life. Rest is woven into the DNA of creation. Our bodies are designed to go and then to rest. When we try to skip the rest part, it affects everything.

Studies have shown that just missing one night of sleep—going for a 24 hour period without sleep—is comparable to having a blood alcohol concentration level of 0.10 which is above the legal limit.

Some effects of going 24 hours without sleep include:

1. drowsiness
2. irritability

3. impaired decision-making
4. impaired judgement
5. altered perception
6. memory deficits
7. vision and hearing impairments
8. decreased hand-eye coordination
9. increased muscle tension
10. tremors
11. increased risk of accidents or near misses

Work and growth and then rest and renewal is the way of nature and of creation. We inhale and we exhale. We have seasons of effort and energy and also of fatigue and floppiness.

Even in music there is sound and there is silence and rest. I heard an interesting story from a number of years ago.

The Seattle Symphony was doing Beethoven's Ninth under the direction of Milton Katims...

At this point, you need to understand two things:

- (1) There's a long segment in this symphony where the bass violins don't have a thing to do. Not a single note for page after page.*
- (2) There used to be a tavern called Dez's 400 right across the street from the Seattle Opera House, rather favored by local musicians.*

It had been decided that during this performance, after the bass players had played their parts in the opening of the Ninth, they were to quietly lay down their instruments and leave the stage rather than sit on their stools looking and feeling dumb for twenty minutes.

Well, once they got backstage, someone suggested that they trot across the street and have a quick drink. After they had downed the first round, one said, "We'd better be getting back. It'd be awfully embarrassing if we were late."

Another, probably the one who suggested this going to the bar in the first place, replied, "Oh, I figured we could use a little more time, so I tied a string around the last pages of the conductor's score. When he gets down to there, Milton's going to have to slow the tempo way down while he waves the baton with one hand and fumbles with the string with the other."

So they had another round and finally returned to the Opera House, a little tipsy by now. However, as they came back on stage, one look at their conductor's face told them they were in serious trouble. Katims was furious!

And why not? After all... It was the bottom of the Ninth, the score was tied, and the basses were loaded!

Ok, that was just silliness. But it seems to me that when God rests on the 7th day it is partly for the purpose of pleasure and recreation. There is a sense that God pauses at the end to enjoy, admire and celebrate what has been done.

How often do you take the time to stop and appreciate what you've done? We're not that good at stopping and celebrating. I'm no sooner finished one challenge than I'm worried about the next one ... because the labour of life never ends. There is always more to do: appointments to make, crises to deal with, things to repair, emails to send, socks to match. But if God stopped and looked back over the week and gave himself a pat on the back for a God-job well done, shouldn't we also do the same?

Some people don't even stop and celebrate big occasions like graduations and birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Some people don't even want others to stop and celebrate their life after they die. It is important that you regularly take time to stop, look back and celebrate what you have overcome and what you have accomplished, even if that accomplishment is not having overcooked the chicken.

Sometimes we don't stop and rest because we're not sure we 'deserve' a break. But more often I think it's because we're afraid. We're afraid of being overwhelmed, afraid of not having enough time to get things done or enough money to pay the bills, afraid of disappointing or letting someone down.

The truth is it takes courage to stop and rest. God is so big and so in charge and so confident that God can take a day and rest and not worry about tomorrow. In the same way, we show that we trust God — that we have faith and that we trust that God is in control when we are brave enough to rest and not worry about all the things that haven't been done and that need to get done. Sabbath is an act of faith. As the theologian Walter Brueggeman says “[*The Sabbath*] announces that the world is safely in God's hands. The world will not disintegrate if we stop our efforts. The world relies on God's promises and not on our efforts.” [Brueggemann, Walter (2017). Interpretation Old Testament Commentary: Genesis (p. 35)]

It took me a long time to figure out what Sabbath means to me, because in case you haven't noticed I work on Sunday and I know some of you do too. (And some of you are retired from work so you now work every day!) As an act of faith, unless there is a funeral or a wedding, I don't work from about Friday at noon until Saturday evening. I take a break from reading emails or tweaking my sermon. I still do things like making meals, which I enjoy, but I try not to pack a lot into my Sabbath and I try to spend a little more time in devotion to God. It's not perfect, but it has been a lot better since I put boundaries on my work. Actually it was through prayer last year in a very, very busy season for me that it became clear that taking a 24 hour Sabbath needed to be a priority.

I am grateful this Labour Day that the Labour Union Movement sacrificed to place boundaries on employers so that we can work and live better, but today it's not so much employers who are making us work too much — it's ourselves! We are our own worst enemies.

God wants you to serve and to make a difference to your family, to your community and to the world — but you are no good to anyone when you are irritable, resentful and burnt out.

Taking care of yourself is not self-ish, it is what is going to help you be the best you can be. When we have the courage and the faith to place some boundaries on our work and service time -- which means saying no from time to time -- then we end up with more energy, more patience, and more joy to do what we were called to do and to be.

Here is a video link to a story of a school bus driver from Texas who goes way beyond the call of his job and makes a difference to his students and community.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/curtis-jenkins-lake-highlands-elementary-bus-driver-beloved-by-community-2019-05-24/?ftag=CNM-00-10aab6g&linkId=68063075&fbclid=IwAR0xL9Z9Pj5m7haQAc9R6fgkxqtZD0JWehlupqGhkHTT7z78MtOkSu-8e5l>

There is so much need in our church, in our community and in our world, and you and I are perfectly designed to serve and to help in big and in small ways.

So what do you say? Will you commit to a time spent with God and nurturing your physical, emotional and spiritual needs?

Let take a moment in prayer...

Thank you God for how you have called us to serve. Some of us are weary. If that's you, just say in your heart "That's me Lord." Jesus said: Come to me you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. & Isaiah 40 says "Even youths will faint and be weary and the young will fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:30-31)

God I pray that you would refresh your people, especially those who are feeling so very tired today. Let them feel your freshening breeze. For some of us, it's our own fault that we are so tired—we push too hard, and we are afraid to stop. Show us what we need to stop. Show us where we need to fit more rest into our day and into our week.

Thank you, God for all who work, for all who work for pay and for all who volunteer their time. Bless each of us in our work. May we work with Joy and serve you and others with our whole heart.

In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.