

## Psalm 46

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah*

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.*

*God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.*

*The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice; the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*

*Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.*

*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*

*Be still, and know that I am God!*

*I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.”*

*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*

This is the Labour Day Weekend. Most of us associate Labour Day with being the last weekend of the Summer and with the return to school and going back to our regularly scheduled programme. 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 1894.

And linked to this day was the struggle for the 8-hour workday. In the mid 1700's and through the 1800's with the Industrial Revolution, 10- 16 hr workdays 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 there were very few rights for these workers. 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.*” (Remember that at this time it's men in the work force ... I have a hard time imagining the same mantra for women. I don't know too many women who imagine having 8 hours of recreation outside of work — much less a decent 8 hours of rest — but it's all a nice thought!)

They understood that those who were profiting from the workers were never going to prioritize the needs of the workers, and so they fought through strikes and negotiations

to make working conditions better. Sometimes unions today get a bad rap. But we all benefited from the sacrifice and fight of unions in the past, and we should be grateful for them.

It also seems that today working conditions seem to be getting worse, not better. Very few people have job security or things like a pension and benefits. Large companies have learned it's better for them to fill up their labour needs with part-time casual work instead of full-time, which means the number of people who end up working two or three jobs has hugely increased.

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 at the church. I remember someone showing me 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 to 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!

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 okay. But I do lament that our society seems to never shut off anymore. We are a 24/7 world. I can order something incredibly random, like a gas cap for my mother's Mitsubishi (which strangely went missing) from that big online store, and it arrives the next day! But that means that people are in warehouses ready and working 24 hrs a day, and delivery people are also delivering around the clock. Even people with more traditional jobs like mine have more porous boundaries than in the past. When I go home, the work doesn't end — because I carry a phone with me with notifications from all sorts of apps and platforms. That's one of the reasons I like going up to Gracefield camp for my holiday. There is very little cell reception, so I have to make an effort and walk to the camp office to get messages.

We're about to launch another year. (Yes, the **New Year** is in January, but September always feels more like the start of a new year! My daughter Petra begins her nursing degree in Kingston this week, and Maisie and Hanah return to school. A lot of our normal activities take a bit of a pause over the summer — unless you are a farmer or in the tourism industry. But come September, we dive back into life and work and

business as usual. And it's busy!! It's not just workers, many of you *retired* people are even busier! Before we jump back, I wanted to stop and press pause.

We have been focussing on the Psalms this summer. I hope you've enjoyed it. This is our final Sunday in the Psalms.

There is a little word that I want you to learn and take away with you today. It's the word **Selah**. It occurs 71 times in the Psalms and 3 times in the book of Habbakuk. *Selah* is partly a musical instruction. Remember that the psalms are like a hymn book for the Israelites. People like Eric and Samia can tell you that knowing where the rests are is important musically.

Grammy award winning bassist Victor Wooten talked about the importance of the pause and rests in his book, *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music*: "One of the most important parts of music is the rest. Rests are as important as the notes. Really play the rests. Use them. We find that they can speak louder and deeper than notes."<sup>1</sup> The word *Selah* is a call to stop and listen. It's a call to take in more deeply what's just been said or sung. It's a call to make room in our crowded life, our crowded mind for God.

How good are you at stopping? Where are the *Selah*'s in your life? I'll admit I'm not great at it. There is always something to do between my work here, my kids and family, and my puppy. It's busy.

Even for those of you whose lives are not as busy because of health or just the stage of life you are in, sometimes it's still hard to live in the *selah*. Even when we are not physically busy we fill our spaces with TV, with social media, with the news and with worry. We humans are not fond of being bored, and sometimes we are afraid of the silence and of the negative voices in our head, afraid of past trauma or grief or future fear and worry taking over, and so we try to fill the gaps and the spaces.

But going, going, going or filling all the spaces 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. **Sabbath** is a weekly *Selah*. 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 7<sup>th</sup> day, God rests.

Rest is woven into the DNA of creation and into the liturgy of the church with the Psalms. Our bodies are designed to go and then to rest — to outward action and then to inner reflection and connection with God and with our true self. Work and growth and then rest and renewal is the way of nature and of creation. We inhale and we exhale.

***Be still and know that I am God.***

Deep rest and renewal comes not just with resting our physical bodies. Sometimes no amount of sleeping or lying in bed can bring refreshment to the mind or soul. As

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<sup>1</sup>[2] Wooten, Victor. *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music*. (New York: Berkley Books), p. 229.

Augustine famously prayed: “*God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.*” True deep rest comes in connecting in small and big ways to God. That takes practice and habit forming. Different practices work better for different people. Learning meditation, having a quiet time of devotion, walking and listening to uplifting music can all bring that rest.

I love that this verse comes not in a pastoral, peaceful psalm but instead in a psalm that speaks to chaos and the world changing. *Though the earth should change, though the mountains be thrown into the sea... the nations are in an uproar...* The person who wrote “*Be still and know that I am God*” was not experiencing stillness in his life or around him. He had reason to fear and things felt crowded and chaotic.

And in the middle of that crowding and chaos there is a reminder — a reminder that God is present. *There is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God.* In the middle of a city, a river! In the middle of the chaos and change, a command to be still. A reminder in the words and in the melody. Be still. *Selah*. Yes, the purpose of being still is to literally recharge and heal and find renewal, but it’s also to **remember**.

Remember God. Remember that God is present. Remember that God loves you and is bigger than you — more able to handle the problems of the world than you! *Selah* invites us to remember and to trust in God.

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)]

I want to read you a children’s story called *Jesus’ Day Off* by Nicholas Allan:

<https://youtu.be/PLJiqioHXI0?si=Lr1dXj4t95mTUMXp>

“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)

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.”

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.