

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson
Sunday, 2nd September 2007
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
14th Pentecost, Propers for Labor Day
Ecclesiasticus 38:27-32a
Matthew 6:19-24

Psalm 107:1-9

1 Corinthians 3:10-14

How did you spend your summer vacation? You did realize this is Labor Day weekend, didn't you? You do know that school is starting, don't you? That it's almost time to set our clocks ahead again? That there could be a frost one morning? That you'd better make your Thanksgiving travel reservations before the airfares increase again? That there's only one hundred twelve shopping days, give or take, until Christmas? That it's almost New Year's Eve and that Mardi Gras is only a month later this coming year?

Have I raised your blood pressure? Made you a little anxious?

Me too.

Let's all take a deep breath.

Ah.

Better.

Seriously.

How did you spend your vacation?

Maybe you're like me – you prefer to take a bit here, a bit there, not wanting to use it all up at once. Or maybe you're like some and prefer a good long stretch – really relishing the time between the last day and the first day of work or school. Maybe you're retired – in which case every day is vacation. Right, George? Yeah, sure...I remember when my dad retired – and he got so busy that he just about wore out his retirement! And my Uncle John – since retiring from full time high school teaching he's taken on developing testing materials for states to use in their standardized examinations, work that occupies several days a week and allows him and my aunt to keep traveling as they've done since they first married.

Let's face it: Most of us have to work, and most of us are fortunate enough to *have* work to do.

You know that poem, "Monday's child is fair of face, Tuesday's child is full of grace?" I just checked. I was born on a Saturday: "Friday's child is loving and giving, Saturday's child has to work for its living."

Doesn't surprise me a bit.

I am one of the truly fortunate people of the world: I love what I do. In fact, I cannot imagine doing anything else.

But how do we spend our vacation? What is it that revs our engines, refreshes us? How do we play? How do we Sabbath?

I truly believe that God wants us to have times of rest. In the Genesis story of Creation, God, the great worker, the supreme architect, *God* – took a day off. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God *blessed* the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” (Genesis 2:1-3, NRSV)

God *blessed* the seventh day and hallowed it. God, none other than God, modeled a behavior that we have such a time following. *Jesus* modeled rest – the Gospel lessons frequently tell us that Jesus went apart from the crowds to pray or to be alone.

As your priest, I am supposed to model Christian life. (Oh, please, save me from being a model.) In my ordination vows I promise that I will do my best “to pattern my life in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that I may be a wholesome example to my people.” (Good grief, I hadn’t read that in a while...) One of the ways I am to be an example is by taking my own Sabbath. Our bishop is very clear on this, and insists that Sabbath time be included in every ministry agreement in the Diocese: forty-eight hours at a stretch, Sabbath time.

Now you know as well as I that forty-eight uninterrupted hours in a stretch aren’t always easy to find. You know as well as I that things happen. The boss calls with an urgent request. The secretary calls in sick. Your colleague asks you to cover for him or her due to a family emergency. Sometimes we just don’t get the day off that we’d planned.

But I do believe that it is part of our lives as faithful people to try as best we can to rest. To care for ourselves and our families. To set aside work and all that is related to it and simply rest. Have fun. Play! Laugh! Be silly! Enjoy one another. Enjoy the gifts God has given us – mountain streams, ocean waves, talented writers of theater, the amazing cultures of the world – or the simple pleasures of digging in the dirt, or talking with a friend, or letting the sun warm your face.

Taking Sabbath isn’t laziness – far from it: It takes *work!* Taking Sabbath needs to be planned – and once it is planned, by hook or by crook, *keep to the plan!* My sister Nikki and I have a running joke – when one of us has run through our week’s upcoming schedule, the other will say, “And when do you plan to be spontaneous?” “Oh, I’ll be spontaneous at about 3:45 Wednesday afternoon.”

Our lives are so full of scheduled activities – it seems to start when we’re quite young, as any parent will tell you. *When*, during that scheduled time, will you take *spontaneous* time for prayer? for running around a park? for playing Frisbee with your dog? When will you have a spontaneous moment to look up at the sky and find a dolphin in the clouds? When will you, as the saying goes, take time to smell the roses?

I sometimes think that Orthodox Jews – and a few Christians – have the right idea about Sabbath. First, it is regular. It is not tampered with. It begins at sundown and ends the next sundown. During that time there is no manual labor; machines are not used – if you want to get somewhere you walk. Hopefully, you will take time to listen to God. Hopefully, you will take time to be with family. And hopefully, you will be refreshed, recharged, ready to take that crash course back into the real world.

I hope you’ve had a great summer, full of relaxation and some fun and some enjoyment of God’s magnificent creation. I certainly have – I’ve rediscovered the joys – and sorrows! – of gardening, I’ve seen new parts of Michigan that are truly breathtaking, and I’ve spent time with my family.

And now that I look toward autumn I nearly gasp for breath – maybe you’ve had the same experience too, when you look at the calendar over the next few months! There’s some really exciting projects coming up and some wonderful feast days and evensongs and events. C.R.O.P. walk is coming up, and Welcome Home Sunday, and we’re inviting CMU students to join us in a really intentional way. We’ll bless the animals in honor of St Francis, and we’ll have a pledge campaign to help us expand our ministries. There will be retreat time and prayer time and midweek Eucharists and Bible Study – and oh, yes...

I’ll try to take some Sabbath time. I’ll try really hard to be a good example. It won’t always work – there are Saturday commitments and the occasional Friday morning meeting, but I’ll try.

Make a bargain with me: Let’s try to be intentional about our Sabbath time. Let’s try not to let it become as over-scheduled as our workweek days. Let’s allow for some spontaneous time.

Like – how about every Wednesday afternoon at 3:45.

Amen.