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Psalm 65 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15
Deeper in Faith: Nature, Sabbath & Rest

We are continuing our summer worship series *Deeper in Faith* this morning. To recap week 4, we heard how after a busy season of healing and teaching, Jesus and the disciples went away into the wilderness for a time of renewal before they fed the multitudes. And we heard how the prophet Elijah, after a major battle defeating the Canaanite god Baal, fell asleep under a broom tree and sought solace in the silence of a cave, before completing his work anointing a new king and a prophet to succeed him. Jesus, the disciples, and the prophet Elijah sought stillness, solitude, silence so that they could live their calling more deeply to serve God.

This morning we revisit the theme of taking time away from our busyness and schedules and daily noisy and grinding rhythms. But today it is not for a purpose of preparing us to be able to do more; not for the purpose of “doing,” rather it is for the purpose of “being.” Being in communion with nature, being in communion with God, and being in community with each other. Hear now these words from Deuteronomy 5, a portion of the statutes and ordinances we refer to as the Ten Commandments:

“ ‘Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

In 2024 Louisiana became the first state in the US to require that all public schools post a copy of the Ten Commandments in the classroom. As some of you might know, I lived for 10 years in northwestern Louisiana, so I have been closely following how this law has been implemented.

Louisiana can be a quirky place – often baffling those of us who move there from other places. Often this quiriness adds to its incredible charm. Louisiana law is one of the quirky features, with its history influenced by the French Napoleonic Code and Spanish traditions more than English Common law.¹ Louisiana has had 11 state constitutions, with the last one adopted in 1974. Since 1978 there have been 321 proposed constitutional amendments have

¹ <https://64parishes.org/entry/napoleonic-code-adaptation>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Louisiana

been voted on in elections, with 221 adopted by voters.² This was one of the things I found baffling living there, voters being asked to micromanage the laws of the state. The state Constitutional Amendments were often deeply specific – things like adding a new school district and changing the retirement age for judges. So it was no surprise to me that the bill to require the display of the Ten Commandments was likewise specific: with displays required to be poster or framed document at least 11 by 14 inches in public school classrooms from kindergarten through state-funded universities; they have to have a large, readable font and include text stating that the commandments were a prominent part of American public education for nearly three centuries³. With all of that specificity, it was surprising to me that the specific Biblical reference for the Ten Commandments, nor the translation, was specified.

So you might be asking, well what is displayed in the classrooms in Louisiana? An article in the June issue of *Christian Century* refers to it as the Louisiana Standard Version, and that it is based on the version that appeared on a monument erected on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol by the Fraternal Order of Eagles as part of the publicity for Cecil B. DeMille's film *The Ten Commandments*. Matt Thomas, the author of the article notes, "The text is quite similar to language from the King James Version of Exodus 20 ... However, having reviewed dozens of published English Bible translations spanning centuries, I was unable to find one that matched the text exactly. The KJV comes closest, but even it differs at a few points."⁴

So let's hear our text this morning from Exodus 20: 8-11:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Do you notice anything different? The rationale for the Fourth Commandment differs between the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments and the Deuteronomy version. The version from Exodus, told as Moses is receiving the covenant from the Lord God, commands Israel to remember the Sabbath and bases it on Creation, stating God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. However, the version from Deuteronomy commands Israel to observe the Sabbath based on their redemption, telling them to rest, and their servants and their animals to rest, remembering they were once slaves in Egypt. Why the change? And does it matter for us today as we seek to grow deeper in faith?

² https://ballotpedia.org/Louisiana_Constitution

³ RS 17:2124. <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/LawPrint.aspx?d=1388961>

⁴ Matt Thomas. The Louisiana Standard Version. *Christian Century*, Published online May 14, 2026 <https://www.christiancentury.org/features/louisiana-standard-version>

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Old Testament, the last book in the Torah or Law portion of the Hebrew scripture. In Greek *deutero* means “second” and *nomnion* means “the law,” so Deuteronomy is literally the second telling of the law. My NRSV study Bible shares that Deuteronomy is the “only part of the Pentateuch (that is the first five books of the Bible) to identify itself explicitly and repeatedly as a record of Mosaic Torah...Torah in these contexts may be characterized as the inspired, comprehensive “polity” (or constitution) that Moses, unable himself to lead Israel across the Jordan, enacts for the people as a normative guide to their corporate existence in the national homeland they are about to occupy.”⁵ I want to repeat a portion of that last line: *a normative guide to their corporate existence*. So we can think of Deuteronomy a bit like the Presbyterian *Book of Order*, which is a normative guide to our corporate existence.

Moses wants to emphasize to the people – a people who have been traveling for 40 years from enslavement into a home in a new land; a people whose journey has been hard and fraught and sometimes dangerous; a people who were about to begin a difficult conquest of the land, trying to eek out an existence as they labor to build homes and cultivate the land and formed community – a people who were going to have new neighbors – a people who were going to have servants who worked for them – Moses wanted to emphasize to the people that a day of rest – a Sabbath day free from work – was a gift from God, just like the freedom from servitude they received when “the Lord your God brought you out from there (Egypt) with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

The Sabbath day is a gift. It is a gift that reminds us of God’s love for because we are God’s precious children. Not because of what he have achieved. Not because we have earned it. Because we – and all people – are God’s beloved children. Keeping the Sabbath was to be a *normative guide to the corporate existence* for the people of Israel, as it is to this day.

Moses recognized that there will be seasons in the lives of the Hebrew people, just as there are seasons in our lives. The ritual actions for this week recognize that the way we rest – the way we take or experience Sabbath - may look at bit different in different seasons of our lives, seasons that can parallel the seasons of the year.

As a people who live in a land with four distinct seasons, we get that! It is easy, or at least easier, for us to live into the gift of Sabbath time in the summer. We here at PCO take July as intentional Sabbath time, putting a pause on meetings and much of our programming, so we can enjoy our days of warmth and evenings of light. I wonder what it might look like to take a Sabbath month in January, cuddling up in front of a fire while watching the snow fall and having another cup of cocoa instead of logging into a Zoom meeting. Something to think about...

⁵ S. Dean McBride. Deuteronomy. In *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. Harold Attridge, General Editor; HarperOne; 2006, p255.

This notion of Sabbath rituals tied to seasons is not unique to our Judeo-Christian tradition. I read an article this week about the Japanese tradition of *koromogae*. Japan divides its year into 72 micro seasons, each named for a specific natural event, for example, ‘*the plum trees begin to bloom*’, ‘*the first peach blossoms*’. The article was by an interior decorator about reshaping your décor for each of these micro seasons, which seemed like a lot of work to me – 72 micro seasons translates to roughly every 5-6 days. But the decorator made the point that this practice is often reflected in our cooking, so why not your tableware and ceramics, which “allows you to transform every space and routine to feel in tune with the Earth.”⁶

I think that the Exodus version (20:8-10) of the Sabbath commandment ties into that notion. “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.”

The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. The Lord made creation holy AND the Lord made the day of rest holy. Psalm 65, which we heard Ewen read, echoes the holiness of creation. As I shared during the Children’s Time and Time of Wonder, sometimes different translations of scripture can pull out nuances not observed in other versions. In the First Nations version, an Indigenous Bible Translation, Psalm 65 opens with these words (vs 1-5):

O Great Spirit, sometimes the only honor I can bring you is my breathless silence. Strong Mountain (Zion) is where we will carry out our sacred promises. All humankind will come to you, for you hear and answer prayer. Our bad hearts and broken ways overpower us, but you release us from them all. Harmony and well-being rest on your chosen ones, those you welcomed to live with you in your gathering place. We will find our full meaning and purpose in the holy place where you live, in the beauty of your sacred lodge.⁷

This sounds like Sabbath-keeping to me. Harmony and well-being. Finding beauty in the sacredness of creation. Creation that is described in the First Nations version with profound richness (Psalm 65:11-13):

Creator, during the growing season, you dance, and wherever your feet touch the ground, Mother Earth brings forth a great harvest of good things. The grasslands in the wilderness drip with dew. Even the little hills put on their finest regalia and sing songs of joy. The meadows clothe themselves with flocks of sheep, and the valleys wear a blanket fragrant with the smell of sweetgrass. Together, their voices echo back and forth with songs of joy.”

⁶ Amiya Baratan. Japan Divides Its Year Into 72 'Micro Seasons' — This Is How People Change Their Homes for Them. *Living Etc.* <https://www.livingetc.com/advice/how-japanese-homes-change-with-the-seasons>

⁷ *First Nations Version. Psalms and Proverbs. An Indigenous Bible Translation.* Intervarsity Press, 2025, 51-52.

The psalmist appreciated that these gifts of creation are present for us to savor. And while we do have responsibility to work and care for the earth, we also have the privilege and responsibility to soak in the joy of the grasslands dripping with dew and the valleys wearing a fragrant blanket of sweetgrass.

It is truly one of the joys of Sabbath keeping to watch as nature takes its course. This week Kent Workman shared with the Green Team an exquisite and deeply theological poem about compost. Yes – compost. The Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes writes, in part,

Giving thanks, you upheave the work
of worms and bugs, the dark labor
hidden from your eyes but not your faith,
the transfiguration of the mess
from the leavings of death to living soil.
To theirs you add your labor,
turning the pile, letting what has been
become what shall be, the sower knows
not how.

Something within is turning, too, of course,
but understanding is as foreign there as here.
You plunge and lift the fork, and learn to trust
that mystery, as with a seed, in which a thing,
a moment, or a memory, bears more
than can be seen or known, but in its dying
is set free to become yet even more,
grace emerging in the turning.⁸

This is Sabbath. The transfiguration of the mess from the leavings of death to living soil. We know not how this happens. And yet we know it does. In the dying of our haste and busyness and overscheduled life, we trust in that mystery, as with a seed, that in its dying, we are set free to become yet even more. If only we can make this a normative part of our corporate existence. May it be so. Join me in prayer.

⁸ Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes. Turning the Compost. *Unfolding Light*.
<https://unfoldinglight.net/2026/07/23/turning-the-compost/>