

FRIDAY, MARCH 22 | SALLY HENDERSON

“Sabbath Rest”

Jesus took naps! He even napped during storms while in a boat. How? He was human and tired; like you and me. Why? Jesus understood and kept God’s Sabbath. The Sabbath is not only the Fourth of the Ten Commandments, but also a gift from God to His creation. This gift is more than a nap.

Sabbath in Hebrew means STOP! Stop working, wanting, worrying and start delighting in God. It’s a way of being and abiding in The Father’s loving presence all week long. God was FIRST to Sabbath. Genesis 2:3ESV “So God blessed the Seventh Day and made it holy, because on it, God rested (& delighted in) from all His work that He had done in creation.”

God knew we would struggle to slow down and abide in our Creator. I certainly struggle. Do you? So, God then Commanded us in the books of Exodus & Deuteronomy to Sabbath. Exodus 31:15 “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, holy the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath is to be put to death.” WHOA, death? Perhaps literally meaning life shortened from lack of true rest, trying to work 60+ hours per week, side hustles, over scheduled activities or getting caught in “The Blue Light Special” of scroll & binge time.

My need for Sabbath evolved out of teacher-tired cat naps in the front pew on Sundays, to full naps on Sunday at home and now fully unplugged from email and social media and any work that’s meant for Monday. I enjoy our family, walks and delighting in God who delights in me (Zephaniah 3:17). I have needed to be intentional and practice Sabbath rest and set boundaries for intrusive tasks. Sabbath is sacred, not just a “ME Day”. The process has led me to expand daily prayer, devotions and Bible study to be more fully in God’s presence the whole week.

The Bible has 169 verses referencing the Sabbath. Sometimes this practice was distorted and exploited in Biblical times. Today it’s overtly discarded. But God... created it and calls the Sabbath holy. Jesus followed suit in the Gospel of Mark 2:27 “The Sabbath was made FOR man, NOT man for the Sabbath.”

So, in the middle of your storm as waves toss your boat, commit to anchoring to God in Sabbath rest. Resting in the fact that you are enough and delighting that God is MORE than enough.

Books referenced and to investigate: The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer and Take the Day Off by Robert Morris

SATURDAY, MARCH 23 | DENNIS BELISLE

ADULTING

- Merriam-Webster defines adulting as the act or practice of attending to the ordinary tasks required of a responsible adult.
- Dictionary.com defines adulting as an informal term to describe behavior that is seen as responsible and grown-up. This behavior often involves meeting the mundane demands of independent and professional living, such as paying bills and running errands.

I am sure we have all seen memes about adulting:

- "You is stressed. You is tired. You is adulting."
- "Things they don't tell you about adulting: One day, you get a little sleepy, and then you stay that way for the rest of your life."
- "Adulting is a soup...and I am a fork!"

That last meme hits home. Unfortunately, I am as guilty of adulting as anybody. It is difficult not to engage in adulting. In the culture that we find ourselves in today, it is even more perilous. Social, political, and financial turmoil with no earthly answers in sight. It is almost programmed into us to "adult." It comes as no surprise then, that as adults we often find ourselves tense, stressed, and unable to relax daily. Maybe some of us even look nostalgically to the days of a carefree childhood when adulting wasn't even an issue that crossed our minds.

PALM SUNDAY

As we enter into Palm Sunday and welcome all our children's choirs to sing in the sanctuary, "Hosanna Loud Hosanna, the rocks cry out the children sing; Hosanna Loud Hosanna, Hosanna to the King of Kings!", imagine this picture if you will:

- Amidst all the political upheaval and religious uncertainty, as well as Herod's greed and opulence - into all these issues rides Jesus, humble and lowly on a donkey. Following Jesus are the children, shouting at the top of their lungs, running all around the temple courts, still waving palm branches. They have not stopped praising Jesus from the time he entered the gate. The children have followed Jesus with their palm branches - in the middle of this beautiful temple area with columns and courtyards, mosaics, and sculptures. They would not be focused on what the adults would be focusing on, which would have been the tensions between the two world views at that moment:

1. the kingdom of God on earth with the personal and religious freedom, and sovereignty, in God.

VERSUS

2. the kingdom of man on earth with sovereignty placed in Rome.

What are the children doing? They are focusing on exactly the right thing...they are focusing on Jesus, worshiping Him, and shouting praises to Him.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23 | DENNIS BELISLE CONTINUED

How difficult it is as adults sometimes to imagine this joyous, carefree worship and praise of the children for Jesus on that day. We, too, live in a world of many viewpoints and are engaged in daily struggles that keep our minds occupied and “adulting”. But consider this:

- The first reference to worship is found in Genesis when Abraham’s faith was being tested by God. This worship was taking place as Abraham thought he was about to sacrifice his only son for God. We read in Genesis 22:5 - He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Let that sink in for a second! I think this was about as “adulting” as one could ever think of in the history of “adulting”, yet Abraham still worshiped. Abraham was a child of God, yet the father of many nations!

Let’s circle back around to the definitions of Adulting.

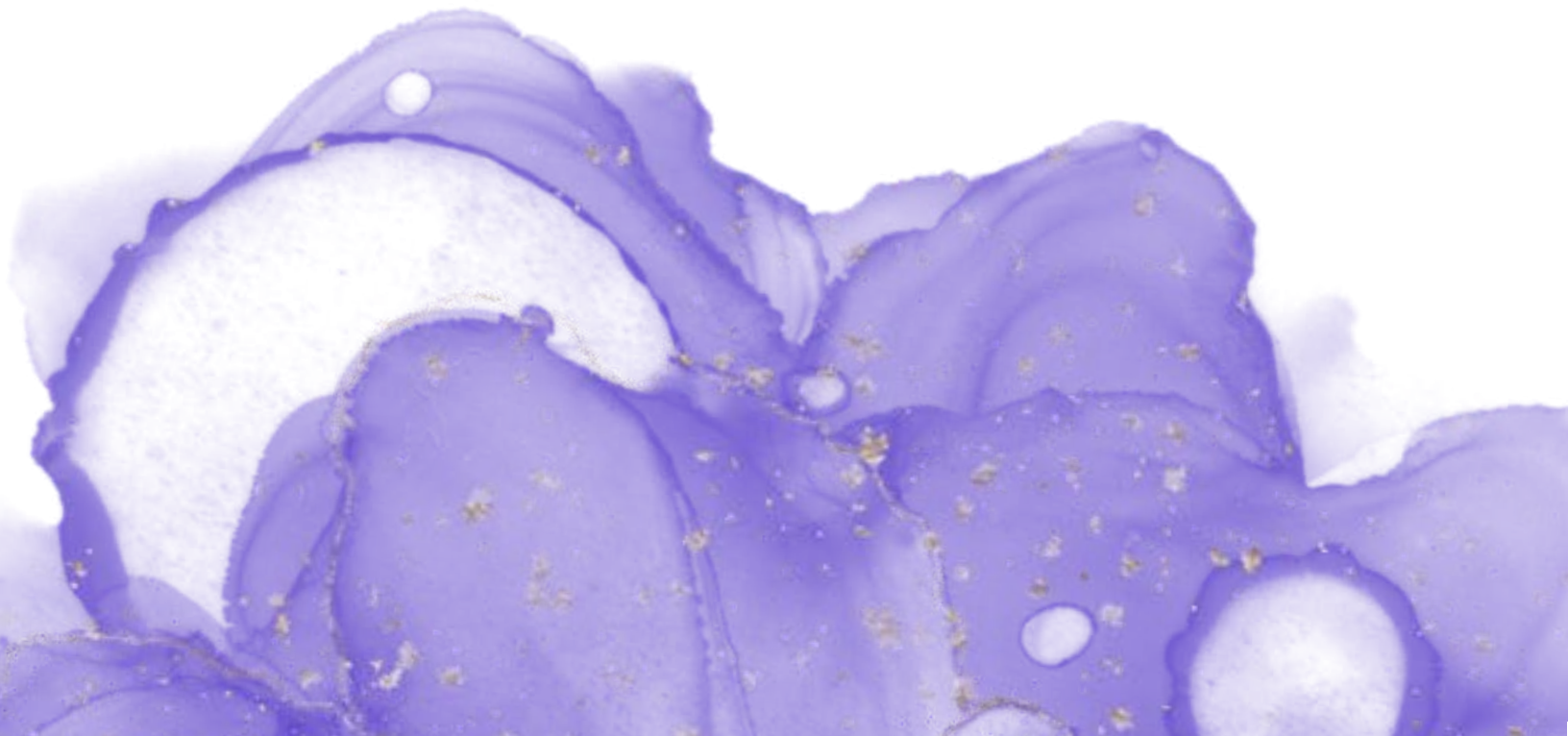
- Merriam-Webster defined adulting as the act or practice of attending to the ordinary tasks required of a responsible adult.
 - God is not ordinary! The extraordinary nature of God is no more evident than in the continuation of Abraham’s story to us. Gabriel Fluhrer, in his article Abraham’s Extraordinary God, writes “We recognize that the scope of God’s promise to Abraham, Gen. 22:17, is nothing short of breathtaking. It invites us to believe that God is generous. He does not withhold His best from His children. He makes extravagant promises to them because He loves them. He shows us a very ordinary man who was granted extravagant promises by an extraordinary God.”
 - God’s extraordinary nature is made even more clear in Romans 8:32, when Paul writes, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us {His children} all things?”
- Dictionary.com defined adulting as... behavior often involving meeting the mundane demands of independent and professional living, such as paying bills and running errands. It’s right there in the definition:
- ADULTING: Independent living (without God) = Mundane life
- Only through God can life become filled with purpose, and we can begin finding meaning in the mundane tasks we complete daily. Rather than focusing on the things of this world, we can fix our minds on things above and see how God works through each minute of our lives. Our mundane moments have meaning and purpose because He is with us. As God’s children, we are united in Christ.


**SATURDAY, MARCH 23 | DENNIS BELISLE
CONTINUED**

It's time to break free from the shackles of adulthood and start worshiping as children because the good news is, as we read in John 1:12, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God".

We must break free from our worldly concerns and as Psalm 96 declares, "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples."

We are His children! On Palm Sunday, ditch the adulthood and worship as children in our praise of the extravagant promises our extraordinary Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ provides us!





Sunday, is a day of rest
and
we hope to see you in
Worship

MONDAY, MARCH 25 | REV. KEEFE CROPPER

“Spiritual Watchfulness”

“And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” (Luke 4:13)

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

Hugh Latimer a famous preacher from the 16th century preached a famous sermon about the most diligent minister in all England. He extolled and praised his tireless industry – ever working, ever attending to the matters of his mission – an evangelist par excellence. And as if giving out an award Latimer said: “There is one that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you: it is the devil.”

At the end of Luke’s temptation narrative he concluded by noting that though defeated, the devil departed “.. until an opportune time.” Evil never sleeps. Just like the famous line in the movie Terminator Luke reminds us of what Arnold Schwarzenegger warned, “I’ll be back.” Indeed, it seems that the devil doesn’t quit. He has a way showing up at our most inopportune times.

Dan Wilt in his book, *Jesus in the Wild* asks, “What is an opportune time for the devil to tempt us, push us, demean us, question our name or our purpose or our calling before God? It is certainly not when we are strong. The enemy will look for a time when we are the most under pressure, the most vulnerable, the most tired, to attack. And that attack will be subtle,”

That being so, the posture of the disciple is that of watchfulness. This is a repeated admonition by various biblical writers and paints an interesting picture. I think of the Shepherd who is ever watchful for the approach of predators. Nehemiah writes of those workers repairing the breaches in the city walls while carrying a sword. Peter speaks of being Sober minded which refers to having presence of mind and means to have "one's wits (faculties) about them". The Disciple is the designated driver of life – taking responsibility for oneself and others.

Watchfulness is not paranoia. It is informed caution. It is an intentional attentiveness to life. With the rise of social media, AI tracks your interactions and interests and then literally tempts you with adds and images, of all generations, we ought to take this seriously. We need to be personally watchful and sober minded. Parents have to be particularly vigilant to look into the lives of their children – wary of online predators; sensitive to messaging that insinuates itself into the minds of their sons and daughters. No, watchfulness is not paranoia but wisdom ever aware that evil never sleeps and there is an enemy looking for any opportune time in your life.

Watchfulness is not paranoia – it’s paying attention – to life. Taking the time to look – and looking with spiritual vision

Prayer: Lord grant us spiritual vigilance, the discernment to sense the approach of evil, and the wisdom to respond with the appropriate means you provide us. Amen.

Scripture: John 20:11-21

My dog, Duke, hates thunder and lightning. I give him special calming medicine but he is still so afraid, he cowers and shakes uncontrollably every time a storm comes through. He looks so miserable! In his mind, it seems the world is ending, so he hides in a dark corner. His eyes can't see or understand what I can see: the big weather radar on TV. I try to tell him that the storm will pass soon, but he doesn't understand - he feels hopeless and helpless.

That's probably how the disciples felt after they saw Jesus die on the cross on that horrible Friday: hopeless, afraid, confused, in hiding... It felt like their world, as they knew it, had shattered. Their Master, their Anchor, their safe harbor - everything was gone. They didn't understand, because they couldn't see the 'big picture' that God could see. They didn't know that in three short days, Jesus would rise from the grave and appear to them!

Perhaps you're going through one of life's storms. Maybe it feels like your world has become a scary, confusing, or hopeless place. Know this: God sees you. You are on His radar. He is with you, even when you are in hiding. He loves you, even in the depths of your fear. Close your eyes and imagine Him breathing His Spirit and His Peace on you.

"Father God, thank you for giving us Your peace. In dark times, help us to understand that You are still in control of the 'big picture', even when we can't see it or understand it. Remind us that You are always with us, listening to us, hearing our petitions, comforting us and providing for our needs, because You love us."

“The Power Of Sin”

Sin is a force so powerful it is permeated through all of humanity and the rest of creation. Vile though it may be we are blind to it without the power of Jesus Christ.

In Romans 3:9-10 Paul tells us “...We have already stated the charge: both Jews and Greeks are all under the power of sin. As it is written, there is no righteous person, not even one.” Aside for Jesus Christ himself no person is without sin; it is not possible for a human to be without sin. That is the overwhelming power that sin holds. Humanity left to its own actions without the compassion of Christ and guidance of God the father would know no life without the weight of sinfulness. Through Christ, we as people were made aware of the destructiveness and toxic nature of sin. It was him that exposed sin for its true self and through him that we received the cancelation of sin and guilt before God. Through Christ that terrible power that sin holds is broken, and we may continue our lifelong journeys seeking God without sins weight.

We move through our daily lives and can become complaisant and ignorant to our own transgressions. Through Christ teachings and example, we know how to recognize sin in ourselves and others therefore it is our duty as Christians and servants of God to use this gift we have been given to its fullest and make meaningful, intentional, actions against sin. We must pray our thanks to the lord for our deliverance from sin and praise his righteousness and grace for allowing us the ability to recognize our wrong doings. Allowing us an escape from the power of sin and granting us the ability to better grow his kingdom.

Taking Up Your Cross: A Deeper Look

In Matthew 16:24, Jesus famously tells his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." This verse is often misunderstood, with "taking up your cross" seen as simply enduring hardship. But, let's delve deeper into its meaning for a richer understanding during Lent.

Crucifixion in Roman times wasn't just a method of execution; it was a public display of humiliation and defeat. The condemned were forced to carry the horizontal beam of their cross to the execution site. So, "taking up your cross" meant accepting complete submission and embracing suffering as part of following Jesus.

What it Doesn't Mean:

Taking up your cross isn't about passively accepting all hardship. It's not about seeking out suffering or viewing every difficulty as a "cross" from God. Following Jesus means putting his will before our desires. It's about sacrificing our comfort, pride, or personal agendas. Sometimes following Christ requires us to make choices that go against the flow or seem inconvenient. Taking up your cross means being willing to make those sacrifices. Living a Christ-centered life won't always be easy. We may face criticism, ridicule, or even persecution for our beliefs. Taking up your cross means having the courage to stand firm in your faith despite opposition. Jesus himself took up the ultimate cross, sacrificing his life for humanity. Following him means being willing to make similar sacrifices, however big or small, for the sake of God's kingdom.

This Lent, use this concept to examine your own life. Ask yourself:

Are there areas where I prioritize my desires over God's will?

Am I willing to make sacrifices to grow closer to Christ?

How can I demonstrate my faith even when it's difficult?

By understanding the true meaning of taking up your cross, you can use Lent as a time to deepen your commitment to following Christ, no matter the cost.