

Sermon for November 6 2005

Growing Passionate Disciples who are Building a
Passionate Church"

"Working from our Rest"

(Genesis 1.28-2.3)

This morning we are continuing in our study of the lifeshapes of discipleship. Over the course of the year I will be teaching you to better understand what it means to live as disciples as we consider eight geometric figures known as life shapes. This morning and then in two weeks time we are going to look at the half circle. When we understand this image we will see how the Christian life is to be lived in the rest of God. It is out of this rest that we will understand what it means to also do our work in God and be fruitful.

As you can see the rhythm of rest and work can be pictured as the pendulum of a clock. As long as the pendulum's rhythm is in sync the clock will keep time as it is supposed to. If the rhythm gets out of sync what happens to the timepiece? That's right it can no longer keep time properly. It can't bear the fruit of accuracy and will need to be repaired. This is also

true of the life of the disciple. Jesus wants us to live in sync with the rhythm he has instilled within the world. We want to learn how to live according to the rhythm of the master.

In order to do this it will help if we can answer two questions. What does the Genesis two mean when it speaks of rest? What does Jesus mean when in John fifteen he speaks of being fruitful for him? This week we will try to answer the first question. What is the rest of God? Next time we will explore what Jesus means when he speak of being fruitful.

Before we look at Genesis 2:1-3 I want to set these verses in the context of the passage that was read earlier. You will notice that after God has created man/woman he commissions them to be fruitful. He describes this in verses 28-31. We then move to a description of the seventh day. This is very significant because it tells us that all human activity is to grow out of our sharing in the divine rest. We are to

work from our rest

not

rest from our work.

This is the rhythm laid out for us in the opening pages of the Bible. So with this in mind let us answer the question: What does *Genesis* mean when it refers to the rest of God.

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. 2 On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation.

The first thing we learn from this passage is that there is a connection between the words completed and rest in this passage. It is interesting that the Hebrew word shabat can mean sabbath, rest and seven. Therefore the heart of the word sabbath is rest and completion.

Let us not misunderstand this word rest. This does not mean rest as we often think of it. When we have been working hard and are weary and tired we need rest in order to restore our strength. But this is not the

significance of the word here. It simply means the ending of activity, the cessation of effort. God was not tired by his creative work, he did not need to rest to restore strength. He did not stop because he was fatigued; he stopped because he was through. He had done all he intended to do and he rested in the midst of a perfect creation. Therefore the true sabbath, we will learn from this clue, is not the keeping of a special day but the ending of a specific effort. That is what sabbath means.

As a second point here, the specific effort from which God rested was creation. The text says "2 On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work." This is the last account of any creative activity. Man was made and then God rested, and there has been no creation since. Man is the last effort of God in creation, on the physical level.

Therefore this *sabbath*, this rest upon which God entered, is still continuing today. God is not creating physically today. God is ceaselessly active in many, many ways, but not in creation. In the fifth chapter of John, when Jesus was in the synagogue the Jews were very distressed because he had healed a man on the sabbath day. The Pharisees accused him of breaking

the Sabbath and Jesus answered them by saying, "My Father is working until now, and I am working," (John 5:17 RSV). His argument was that it was proper for him to do a deed of mercy on the sabbath day because he was simply imitating his Father who was ceaselessly active in mercy and love on his sabbath day, his long rest. God had stopped creating but he was still busy in a thousand different ways. Thus the sabbath means that God's creative activity has ended.

As a third point we must therefore recognize that the weekly sabbath, i.e., Saturday, is not the real sabbath. It never was, and it is not now. It is a picture or a reminder of the real sabbath. The true sabbath is a rest; the Jewish sabbath is a shadow, a picture of that rest. All the Old Testament shadows pointed to Christ. They were predictions, foreviews, of the coming of the One who would fulfill all these remarkable things. Every lamb that was brought as an offering was a shadow of the work of Christ. Every burnt offering, every bit of incense that was offered, was a picture of the fragrance of Jesus Christ. The tabernacle was a shadow of him. The high priest, in his garments and his office, was a shadow of Christ as our High Priest. Read the book of Hebrews and you will see

how beautifully all this is brought out. These Old Testament shadows were looking forward to the coming of the One who would fulfill these and thus end them. When the work of Jesus Christ was finished the shadows were no longer needed.

Back in 1983 when Peggy and I started dating we were apart for the summer months. I was in Montreal and she was working at a place called St. Andrews by the Sea in New Brunswick. While we were separated we wrote to each other very regularly. As I read Peggy's letters I would look at a picture I had of her. It would remind me of her as I read the descriptive letters she had written to me. The letters and the picture helped me to get to know her better and reminded me of her. But when she came home I no longer needed the picture. The real thing Peggy, was here with me. She replaced the shadow, the photograph.

This is exactly what happened with these Old Testament shadows, including the Sabbath. When the Lord came, and his work was ended, making possible the true fulfillment of God's intention in the Sabbath, the picture was no longer needed.

A fourth fact about this: Though this shadow-sabbath, i.e., Saturday observance, ended with Jesus, the true sabbath, the rest of God, God's ceasing from effort, continued and still continues today. That sabbath, in its application to us, is defined for us in Hebrews 4, Verses 9 and 10:

So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. 10 For all who enter into God's rest will find rest from their labors, just as God rested after creating the world. That is what the true sabbath is, to cease from your own labors, your own efforts, your own activity; to cease from your own works.

"Well," you say, "if I did that I would be nothing but a blob, an immobile inactive piece of flesh." Exactly! Of course you would. But the implication is that you cease from your own efforts and depend on the work of Another. This is one of the foremost things Paul teaches when he describes what it means to live by faith in Jesus. Another One is going to work through you. This is why Paul cries, "Not I, but Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," (Galatians 2:20). This was also the secret of the life of Jesus, as we have seen. He himself said, "It is the Father who

dwells in me who does the work," (John 14:10). "The Son can do nothing by himself," (John 5:19). This is the secret of the Christian who learns "it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," (Philippians 2:13). So the secret of true Christian life is to cease from dependence on one's own activity, and to rest in dependence upon the activity of Another who dwells within. That is fulfilling the sabbath, the true sabbath.

That true sabbath, we read in Genesis 2, God blessed and hallowed. Now blessing is connected with fruitfulness and dominion. God blessed the animals and said, "Be fruitful and multiply." He said to the man and woman in chapter 1:28 "Be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over all the earth." That is what blessing means, to make possible both fruitfulness and dominion. When God "hallowed," or "sanctified" (KJV), the sabbath, he assigned it a specific function to perform. That is what sanctification always is -- to put to a proper or intended purpose. Thus God designated the true sabbath to the function of producing blessing (fruitfulness and dominion) for man. This is why the Lord Jesus declared, "the sabbath is made for man; not man for the sabbath," (Mark 2:27). So the true

sabbath rest is to rest on Another, and this is the divine provision to produce fruitfulness and abundance of victory in a Christian's life.

Let us look at that a little closer because that is God's provision for living adequately today. Are you adequate? Do you find yourself able to cope with the situations in life into which you are thrust day after day, moment by moment? Are you confident? Are you capable? Are you panic-proof? Are you filled with fruitfulness, fragrance, abundance? God's rest is designed to produce that. God said it would. He makes it available for that purpose and it is the only thing that will do it; there is no substitute.

When we rightly understand the sabbath we will no longer look to ourselves for strength but to Him. God has designed an adequate provision for our weakness, teaching us how to operate on an entirely different basis, to no longer look to oneself but to look to the one who dwells within; to expect him to do something through you, using your mind, your will, your emotions, your feelings, but it is he who does the work. But unless you begin to count on his working you will never experience it.

Right here comes the sixth factor, the one serious problem which remains. Christians say again and again, Why is this so difficult to do? Why do I have so much trouble living in the rest of God

Let's turn back to Hebrews 4:9-11:

9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Why is it that Hebrews 4:11 goes on to say, "11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience"

Why must we work at this? Some seem able to learn it, and from time to time we see someone virtually come alive and their Christian life is simply transformed by learning to operate on this principle. They begin to do

things and to enjoy them, experiencing the blessing and excitement of Christian living.

Others say, "I see all this, and I want to do it too. I know what is said about how to rest, but I try it and it doesn't work. Why? Why do we fail?" The answer is given, I think, in a word of the Lord Jesus, recorded in Matthew 11, words we well know:

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls.
30 For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

Notice that twice in that passage is the word *rest*. One rest is given, the other is found: One is experienced when we first come to Jesus Christ. He *gives* us rest. Do you remember when you came to Christ? You simply believed what the Scripture said, that on the cross of Calvary he took your place, he died for you; he bore the punishment for your sin; he was wounded for your transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquity; and you believed that. Immediately there was a sense of

peace flooding your heart, a quietness. You felt no more guilt, no more fear of death, no more need for painful efforts to win Brownie points with God. You were resting on the work of Another. Christ paid it all; you were freely forgiven. What a sense of rest that was! He gave it to you.

But as you went on as a Christian you found that problems began to return and failures came. Your Christian life became boring and dull, barren and uninteresting. You knew something was wrong and you resolved to try harder, to give yourself more fully to Christian activity, to throw yourself into it with more zeal and effort. This you did, and for awhile things went better, then it seemed to ebb out again into the same old thing. You ended up bored and disillusioned, disenchanted, discouraged. What is the answer? Well, it is what our Lord said,

"Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls."

A yoke is made to fit over the necks of two oxen. A yoke is always made for two, never for one. Jesus was a carpenter, and in the carpenter shop in Nazareth he often made yokes. From this he draws this very apt simile. "Enter into the yoke with me," he says, "you on one side; I on the other." A yoke is also a symbol of servitude, of controlled labor and activity. It means the end of self-service. When an ox is yoked, he is no longer free to do what he wants to do. He is under the direction of the owner, the driver. To be yoked means the end of running his own life and seeking his own way. This is what Jesus means. He did this. "He learned obedience by the things which he suffered," the writer of Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 5:8). He learned to do what he did not want to do, because God wanted him to do it. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you

When you enter into the yoke with Jesus you expect the Father to take over the program of your life. You may be surprised what he does with it. You no longer have the right to decide what you are going to do with your life. It does not make any difference what time of your life you enter into this yoke. When you enter into the yoke with Jesus Christ you give up the right to

determine what your life may be. You expect him to direct you.

It is his job to give the orders, it is his job to make you know what he wants you to do. He may make some dramatic changes, or he may not. He may leave you right where you are, doing what you are doing now, or he may tell you to stop it all, at great cost perhaps, outwardly, and leave it and go some place else to do something else. But one thing is certain, one thing he surely will do, no matter if he sends you some place else or leaves you right where you are -- one thing he will certainly do: He will remove you from the spotlight, out of the center of things, he will enroll you in school.

And do you know what the curriculum will be? "Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle Matthew 11:29b He will begin to teach you humility -- how not to be the center of attention, how to be content with letting someone else get all the credit. He will enroll you in the school that cancels out ego satisfaction. That is the principle by which the world lives, in its delusion. It is the thing that is destroying human life; the desire to be a god, your own god; to run your life to suit yourself. This can never be for those who are

called to be Jesus Christ's -- "you are not your own, you are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a).

The reason why you cannot enter into the joy and glory and excitement of the rest which God has provided in ceasing from your own activities and resting upon his, is because, in some way or another, you are protecting some area of the ego, the self-life, saying, "This is mine; keep your hands off." As long as you do that you cannot have rest.

Rest is the secret of human fruitfulness. As you consent to this, a wonderful thing will begin to happen. You will find rest. Jesus said you would. "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls." Rest, with all it implies in terms of fruitfulness and dominion; reigning, ruling, producing that which is worthwhile and satisfying in life. That is the secret of life. This is why Jesus said, "If any man will save his life, he shall lose it. But if he shall lose his life for my sake, he shall find it," (Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24). He will find rest, he will fulfill the sabbath for that is what the sabbath is. It is God's divine provision for us.

Prayer:

Speak to us, our Father, with those living words which individually suit the message to each heart. Make us to understand ourselves and our relationship to you. Help each one of us to say, with all our heart, "Lord, I acknowledge it. I surrender. I give to you the direction of my life, and I look to you to indicate to me what it will be. Lord, I'm ready to follow, depending upon you to produce in me what you want." In Jesus' name, Amen.