



First United Church of Oak Park

Never More Like God
Genesis 1:26—2:4
The Rev. John Edgerton
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When am I best self? What makes me worthy? When do I truly belong? It depends on who you ask. If I ask our society general, it has to do with work.

Our society places huge value on work. The work that I do, that is what makes me who I am and defines my role in society. Whether that work is paid or volunteer, whether my work is in the home raising children or in an office doing business, whether my work is social activism or single-minded focus on making money, what I do is what defines me as a person. It even shows up in small talk as the most natural way to open a conversation: what do you do? In our society, what sort of work a person does defines them, offers them a sense of belonging, dangles the possibility of being worthy.

Inside of any one kind of work, too, there are striations, strata, levels that define whether a person is successful at that work, or not. And the thing about success is it is always upward looking. Work in our society is viewed as something of a ladder, intended to be climbed up and up and up. I am always supposed to have my eye on the next step, the next phase. But the ladder doesn't go anywhere particular. There's no level of achievement, no amount of money or power or influence where society will say "that is enough." Society says "Climb," but the ladder just keeps going up, up towards nothing, towards more up. In our society, who I am is not worthy, who I might someday be, that is who is worthy.

This focus on work and ladder-climbing is so pervasive that it has come to define childhood, too. Children are supposed to do well at school to get into a good spot on the next rung up of school, holding a diverse range of extra-curriculars so that they appear well-rounded and can get into a good college, which you need to get a good job, a good job with plenty of rungs to climb on the ladder. Children, then, are sort of...adults in waiting. Vertically challenged workers on a long unpaid internship.

When am I best self? What makes me worthy? When do I truly belong? It depends who I ask. If I ask this question to our society in general, the answer is work, work, work, work, work. My best self is who I am when I am working; I belong when I fit neatly into the world of work; and I will be worthy when I reach some stratospheric height of achievement always up the ladder from where I am.

When am I best self? What makes me worthy? When do I truly belong? It depends who I ask.

What if I am asking the Law of God?

Then the answer is quite different. Then the answer is, Sabbath. I am at my best when I am resting; I belong when I am not working; I am worthy when I have stopped my efforts to be someone else. Sabbath. It is time carved out of the week in which all work is to stop, and a person is to simply be. Simply rest.

This is part of the ten commandments, right up there with "There is only one God" and "Thou shalt not kill;" honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. For in six days God created the heavens and the earth, and on the

seventh day, God rested from all the work of creation. The law of keeping Sabbath, of mandating holy rest, this is a central and inextricable part of our faith. God rested on the seventh day and so we who worship God must rest too. If we take Sabbath rest out of the way God has envisioned, we have not God any more, but something else; something of our own creation.

God rested on the seventh day, and on that day, God did not do anything other than simply be in the presence of creation, which was good just as it was. Resting meant that God could be in the presence of what God had created, enjoy what had been made, which was indeed good.

God commands people to rest too, to free us up from needing to do anything other than simply be in the presence of God and the presence of God's good creation. There is no more natural, instinctual joy than of simply being together, without any agenda or purpose. No fuller sense of belonging than to ask after one another, to know about one another's lives and to share in triumphs and disasters together.

Gathering together on the Sabbath to simply BE. It reaches and thrums that deep part of me that knows I am supposed to belong, to be part of a people. When I rest on the Sabbath, I am giving honor and thanks to God who created the world. I am emulating God, imitating God, seeking to be like God. Because I am never more like God than when I am at rest.

Don't get me wrong, I am not particularly similar to God. I cannot speak worlds into being, shape oceans and mountains with my breath. I make mistakes and do the wrong thing, speak when I should be silent and remain silent when I should speak up. I cannot be perfect. But I can rest. I can rest just as God rested. That means that when I rest, I am more like God than I am at any other time. When I rest, I am more like who God created me to be than at any other time. When I rest, I am more closely following what God wants for my life than at any other time.

What do I need to achieve in order to be worthy? Simply rest, because I already am worthy. When am I my best self? When do I truly belong? What makes me worthy? Resting, on the Sabbath. The law of God is clear about this.

This is a hard thing for me to accept. This Sabbath commandment is a hard thing for me to follow. This is hard; every fiber of my being resists the idea that if I stop and rest, that I will be able to find belonging. What will I talk to people about if it isn't about work? At my core, at the heart of me, there is a fear that I am not enough, that I only have value if I do, that I need to get somewhere else, be someone else in order to be worthy. That fear cannot be soothed by working, anymore than a fire can be quenched by stacking it with firewood.

And you, you do not need to work in order to be have an identity. If you wish to know who God has made you to be, then simply rest. Honor the Sabbath and you will be exactly who God made you to be. If you wish to find belonging, then simply rest. Here in the assembly of the people of God, gathering in Sabbath rest, here you belong just as you are.

In prayer and silence and contemplation and song and joy and tears and worry and love, here is a people where you belong. You don't have to work to deserve a place here. If you wish to be worthy, to know that you are good and beloved, then simply rest. You have a right to exist, just as you are, you don't need to work to earn that. Now, right now, in this quiet moment, in this time set out of time, you are worthy right now. You are living just as God intended, right now. You are beloved of God, right now. Rest assured of that.