

**A SERMON BY REV. MARTHA M. SHIVERICK**  
**Fairmount Presbyterian Church**  
**Hebrew Scripture – Genesis 2:1-3**  
**Gospel Lesson – Matthew 11: 28-30**  
**Sermon: Thanksgiving for Work and Celebration for Rest**  
**September 4, 2005**

It would not be right to preach a sermon on the celebration of rest and Sabbath with out first acknowledging the gift of work. Labor Day is something to be celebrated. If you have ever been unemployed or underemployed you know that finding work and a career that is satisfying is a true gift. Our work defines us and gives us self worth, and not finding work does awful things to a person's ego. It's hard to look for work when what you define yourself by is gone. So for anyone who is in the congregation now who is looking for work, you are in my prayers. And so are the thousands of people who lost their jobs and sources of income this past week because of Hurricane Katrina. It is good to remind ourselves that working is a blessing. Sometimes we take it for granted. A friend who just got a new job two weeks ago taught me a wonderful lesson. I was complaining about my busy schedule, how worried I was that I was not able to help my son get ready for college, (he did very well on his own), and she made a statement that made me take back my complaint. She said, "How lucky you are to have your calendar so filled. Mine has nothing on it." So for all of us with our calendars too busy, who feel that they need to be reminded to breathe, let us give thanks to God for the circus of our lives. And, let us remember and support those whose calendars are empty.

I love my job and I hope those of you who are employed feel the same way about yours. And I feel that most of us are truly called into the positions we have. Teachers are definitely called by God and as my kids started school this week, I thanked God for there wonderful teachers and professors who are opening up, feeding, and filling their beautiful minds. And as we heard of all the devastation and post hurricane nightmare in the Gulf, we know that the emergency people, the clean up crews, the police, the National Guard, rescue personnel, are all gifts from God. My guess is that for every story of the looting that took place in New Orleans in the past few days there are countless stories of people's bravery and efforts in saving lives and caring for others. Thank God for those individuals and for their willingness to work in this terrible condition. The stories of their heroic gestures are just now being told. Yesterday afternoon on NPR there was a special where people called in from Louisiana and shared their stories of concern and care. One of the people who amazed me was the Governor of Louisiana. Her calm in the chaos, her concern for the people of the state, her asking for this last Wednesday to be a day of prayer of thanksgiving for those who survived and comfort for those whose loved ones did not was inspiring. She is placed there by God. And in the weeks and months ahead, as people pick up and rebuild their lives, we will hear the stories of the hard work, the aid, the movement to start over and find new jobs and lives. Yes work is something for which we should be thankful, work is indeed a gift from God.

This morning's scripture lessons are about rest. Rest is also something to be celebrated, but it is celebrated along side of work. Think about the fact that this weekend we celebrate Labor by taking a day of rest. Truly the two go hand and hand. The first scripture passage is about the first Sabbath, the rest God took after a long week of work. This part of God's week was called hallowed. Notice that God did not call the day heaven and earth were made, the one where the earth and seas were divided, the creatures of the land and sea were created, or even the day that we the people were made, he did not call any of these hallow. That is reserved for the day he rested. And from that first Sabbath came our whole custom of setting a day aside for rest. The books of Exodus and Deuteronomy state these Sabbath Laws clearly, we are to set aside a day to rest. It is important to God! As the temple was established, the Sabbath day also became the day of worship, meditation, and instruction in religion, but always still a day set aside for rest. Even today when I visit my friend's conservative synagogue, they ask you not to write in the Temple and do not have pencils in the pews to entertain yourself with during a lengthy sermon, or to take notes with during a particularly inspiring one. No, writing would be work, and this is Sabbath. This is even practiced more strictly in the Orthodox and Hasidic temples where the members must walk to temple on the Sabbath and a childhood friend of mine, who has become a Hassidic Jew, unscrews the light bulb in his refrigerator on Sabbaths so he isn't turning on a light when he opens the door. This might seem extreme to us perhaps, but a part of following God's laws to him. And the other extreme might be our secular society and culture which has so perverted the idea of a day of rest, that we feel we must cram in all the chores, the errands, and the kids sports events on the day we call Sabbath.

The reality is that we need rest! Our bodies need down time to recharge and stay healthy. We can not do better than God, and if God needed to rest on the seventh day, then so do we! There is something sinfully prideful about the person who martyrs themselves by working until they drop. No one is so important that they can not take a rest and down time. And then there is the religious reason to rest. We need down time to reflect and to celebrate. We need down tie to contemplate our relationship with God, to think about the covenant we have with God, that God will not desert us.

The Gospel lesson is another promise of rest, this time Jesus' promise and gift of rest. Jesus says "Come to me all you that are weary and carrying burdens and I will give you rest". This familiar passage gives us comfort at memorial services and at the Communion table and it is referred to as the Great Invitation. The very words have a calming effect on us. It is a promise that Jesus will take away whatever yoke we are carrying, what ever burdens are weighing us down, and will comfort us and give us lighter loads to carry. Jesus might be referring to the burden of Jewish Law being lightened by the law of love, but he also is offering us rest and comfort. Jesus says that as we learn of him, learn of his humbleness, his gentleness, his calm, loving and nurturing Spirit, we will receive a peace and a calming of our anxieties.

And of coarse the reason for rest and for Sabbath, is so that we can return to work! God took a Sabbath day and then returned to the job of being God. We know that God's work really just got started at that point. After all, God had just made us! And Jesus lightens

our burdens and gives us rest in order that we are not weighed down by the heavy yokes we carry, that we are not drowning in our anxieties, but that we can find peace and calm to move on and go forward. We rest, because we have much to do, we rest to be recharged to do what God calls us to, We rest because we are Christ's body doing Christ's work on earth. We rest because we want to bring about God's kingdom, God God's realm on earth.

I hope that all the people in Louisiana, in Mississippi, and in the panhandle of Florida understand this. I hope that all the emergency personnel who have been working since the Hurricane hit this past week hear this good news. I hope that the people whose job it was to go into all the homes and see if the people were alive or dead know this. I hope the people bringing the supplies of water and food to the people now homeless know this. I hope that the Presbyterian disaster team that was sent down by the national church to assess the damage and see where our church can be most effective know this. God has given us tasks. God has called us to work. We are not created to inaction but are asked to be agents of God's justice, hospitality, and love. But, God also requires us to rest. We can not do it all and we can not do it all the time. And, through our faith and understanding of Christ, we know we do not do it alone. Christ is holding us all and guiding us all in our work. Christ is lightening our burdens and reducing our anxiety levels. We are with Christ and with one another through him.

And this is good news for us here in Cleveland Ohio, sitting in this very comfortable church about ready to have communion together and a really good reason for us to celebrate this Labor Day Weekend! We celebrate our Sabbath; we are nourished spiritually by the communion service, in order that we go out and continue our tasks. We celebrate our call to Sabbath, to rest, and we thank God for our calling and work. Amen.

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