

March 13, 2010

Scripture Reading: Exodus 16:11-32

"Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy."

The word "sabbath" comes from the Hebrew word "shabbat" which means, "to cease." It's origins trace back to the creation story in Genesis 2 where God rests on the seventh day, blessing the day and making it holy. Observing the sabbath was expected of God's people and was part of God's covenant with Israel. To get a sense of how seriously the commandment to observe the sabbath was to be taken, read Exodus 31:12-18. It says that failure to keep the sabbath was punishable by death.

Sabbath observance was, and still is, an essential aspect of Jewish identity. This helps us understand why the religious leaders were so upset when Jesus violated their understanding of Sabbath law. (See Matthew 12:1-14 for one example.) It's important to remember that Jesus didn't undermine the Sabbath law, but set it straight.

God commands sabbath rest so that human beings can be whole and healthy. Rest is essential for renewal. Sabbath is time set apart from the daily demands of life for connection with God, for connection with friends and family, for connection with God's creation. In fact, the Old Testament commands God's people to let the land experience sabbath rest too. (See Leviticus 25:4)

Like the Israelites who received the manna in the wilderness, observing the sabbath requires that we trust that God will provide. To rest from our labors requires that we trust in the faithfulness of God's promises.

Finding time for sabbath rest in this day and age is not easy, but that makes it even more important. Look at your calendar. Consider your life. Where are the days and hours you set aside to fully trust God so that you can rest and renew? Where are the moments you stop what you are doing long enough to (re)connect with God and your neighbor?

Ask God to lead you into sabbath rest.

"Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy."