

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan
Sunday, June 20, 2021
“Creation to New Creation”
Part 3: “Sabbath and the New Creation”
Rich Rej

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Welcome, Announcements and Opening Prayer

Welcome to worship at First Presbyterian Church on Sunday, June 20th. I am so glad you have chosen to watch online today.

I want to, first, thank Darlene Maginley, Ashley Ashley, and music by Jerry and Sharon Smith. Rich Rej is preaching today. It's going to be great. And of course, without Susan Underhill, you would not be seeing this! Thank you all for serving in worship today.

I do have a couple quick announcements before we get going. As always, I encourage you to read your bulletin online, or check the church website, to see all the information available, but I want to highlight a few things.

First, congratulations to Dana and Teri Stonerook for being awarded the Unsung Hero Award this last Sunday during the parking lot service. What a great time for our family of faith to celebrate them and all they have done for our church!

The Presbyterian women are hosting a “Meet and Green” on Tuesday, June 22nd, at 7:00 p.m. in the church parking lot. Please contact Kiki Farrow for more information and to RSVP.

Now families, I really want to encourage you. Coming up, Ms. Darlene is leading us in this super exciting 2021 Vacation Bible School! The theme is Rocky Railway. I will be there with my kids. We can't wait! The fun will last for the week of July 18th. Don't get left at the station! Check out our church's website. You'll be able to sign up there. It's going to be a great week of ministry and a lot of fun.

Next, the National and International Mission Committee has a unique mission experience available to you at Colina de Luz orphanage in Mexico. Anyone 21 years old or older can join in the trip, as well as those who are 18 years or older with a parent or guardian. It's going to be August 3rd through August 9th. If you want to find out more, talk to Jim Bernard for details. It's an incredible opportunity. I've been to Colina de Luz. If you have a chance to go, August 3rd to August 9th, stop what you are doing, clear your calendar and go serve with Jim Bernard. Colina de Luz is an amazing place and it will change your life.

Finally, I just want to say a huge thank you for everyone who has donated to Renew, Refresh, and Return. The campaign has raised over \$72,000 in just over a month, which means we can now afford to paint the ceiling, upgrade the lighting, install live streaming equipment, all in the sanctuary. Thank you again for helping us reach that goal, as we restart sanctuary services in late July.

At this time, we will have our opening prayer. Let us pray.

Lord, we come before you and we thank you for today, for this opportunity to worship you online. We have this opportunity to serve you and to spend time just reflecting and giving you glory. We thank you for our Creation to New Creation series, as we learn today about how to become a new creation and live that out in the idea of Sabbath.

We pray we honor you with our worship and with our learning today in our service. In your precious Son Jesus' name. Amen.

**Dr. Jerry Smith, Director of Music sings "We are God's People"
(Sharon K. Smith, Accompanist)**

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children's Ministry – Children's Message

Good morning, kids! So, I would like to read you a little part of our Bible passage for today. It comes from 2 Corinthians, chapter 5.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Now, there were a lot of big words in that passage. So what does it mean? I don't know either! But Mr. Rej is going to explain that in the sermon today.

So, I want to take you to another Bible passage that we're talking about today. This one is a little easier to understand. This is from Genesis, chapter 2, and it says:

² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

So what does that mean? That's a little easier to explain. You guys know the story about how God created the world in six days and then on the seventh day he rested. Well, that seventh day of rest is really important. All through the Bible there are places where it talks about we are supposed to keep the Sabbath and make it holy. The Sabbath is our Sunday, so how do we make it holy?

God was very smart! He knew that after people work all week they're very tired. Our bodies and our minds need a chance to rest and relax and just have fun. So God wants us to do that on Sunday, on the Sabbath day. Now he not only says to have fun and to rest and relax, God also wants us to remember him on the Sabbath day. He wants us to look around at the world that he created for us and to appreciate what he gave us in his creation. He wants us to take time to worship him, to remember that God has blessed us and for us to take time to thank him for all of the blessings that he gave us. He wants to spend time with us in prayer and in Bible study.

I don't know if your house is like mine, but on Sunday afternoon that's usually the time that we remember all of the things that didn't get done before we have to go back to work or to school. There's grocery shopping and errands.

Well, this afternoon I have a challenge for you and for your moms and dads. Instead of running around and doing all of the things that have to be done before you go back to work or before you go to daycare or school tomorrow, take time to enjoy God's creation, to rest, to relax, to enjoy some family time. Most of all, to tell Him thank you for giving us that Sabbath. Let's pray together.

Dear Father, we thank you so much for the beautiful world that you created for us. In the summertime we especially enjoy being outside in nature and really seeing and feeling and being a part of your creation. Help us to remember that you have set aside a day for us to rest and for our bodies and our minds to take a break from the worry in the busyness of the week. Help us to take that time and to enjoy it together and to enjoy it with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rich Rej – Introduction to Sermon Theme

Before we get going, I just want to recognize all the fathers in the congregation. You guys have a tough job and I want you all to know, as a dad, how much I appreciate what you do every single day. Thank you, guys, for what you do for your families, for what you do for this church and for what you do to build God's Kingdom here on earth. Happy Father's Day!

I am glad to be here today to be part of this service with you, getting a chance to read the sermon in this environment. I have been able to see the church a little bit on my own personal walk-through. I think you're all going to be amazed. It's been a long time since we've been together, worshipping in the Upper Room, in the sanctuary. The Buildings and Grounds Team and *all* the teams have just been doing a magnificent job! I think you're going to be very happy when you see everything that's been done.

Two weeks ago, Mark spoke about God's creation. God said it was a very good thing when he created humanity on the sixth day of creation in a special relationship that Adam and Eve shared with God. Mark spoke about the sin that Adam and Eve committed when they disobeyed God. The result of the original sin was their separation from God and that our reconciliation to God and to the new creation is through Jesus Christ Himself.

The price was paid by Christ, but the choice of how we live our life is ours. Last week Ashley spoke about how society tends to look out for number 1, and that number 1 is usually the person looking back at us in the mirror every single morning.

We are called to a different purpose, however, as followers of Christ. We are to remember that Jesus died for us and that we are to live for Him. He calls us to use our unique gifts and talents to serve God. We are to remember it is not our work that justifies us but the faithfulness of Christ that results in our sanctification, our reconciliation, and all that we do is to be in the name of Jesus. This week we're going back to the creation story and then talk about what it means in the light of the new creation.

Rev. Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor – Scripture Readings

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Friends these are the words of our Lord. Thanks be to God!

Rich Rej — Sermon: Sabbath and the New Creation

In this time before we listen to the sermon, may we observe silence for a moment as we welcome God's presence into our hearts, as God calms our hearts and calms our minds.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift and the blessing of this day. We thank you for technology that allows us to worship together even when we can't be physically together ourselves.

Calming Father, I pray that all who watch this sermon are blessed and drawn nearer to you. I pray that they would feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, that they would hear the Holy Spirit's words being spoken through me today. Father, I pray all of these things in the name of your Son our Lord and Savior, our peace, our hope and our healing. Amen.

For our scripture lesson this week we go back again to the creation story. We know that within Genesis an entire chapter is spent detailing how God created the heavens and the earth. He created everything we see, and all of life we can see around us.

When we look at the creation story, we can assume that it was made perfect when God created humanity. Everything in creation leads up to humanity being made by God. I would think that if we stop here we have missed the point. Creation wasn't made complete with us. It was made complete with the Sabbath. It was made perfect in the Sabbath because this was God's final act in creation.

Listen again to the words of the scripture reading that Ashley read this morning:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

It does seem likely that the emphasis for God creating for six days and then resting on the seventh day is deliberate. God's motive is a model for human activity, humanity made in the image of God.

To help bring this point home, the word Sabbath is mentioned over 200 times in the Bible. When the Ten Commandments are described in Exodus and Deuteronomy, more words are used to describe the Sabbath than any of the other commandments. The importance of the Sabbath is further underlined by God blessing the day and calling it holy.

What does this mean for us today? You knew we weren't going to slide past this question, right? Because we can't talk about the Old Testament and not see how God is calling us in 2021. Why? Because God has been working through the entire Old Testament and faithful for the entire Old Testament, been faithful through the entire New Testament and He is faithful to us today. He was faithful to the Israelites and He continues to be faithful to us now.

We do face a difficult dilemma with respect to the Sabbath, though, because we live in a society that moves very, very quickly, and we live in a world that tends to reward the over-achiever. Our society awards the successful person with the opportunity to get more - more money, more accolades, more stuff.

We can be tempted to view our worth in terms of what we do. In fact, the very first question we're asked when meeting someone is, "What do you do for a living?" Our response to that question determines if the other person views us as successful or not. If we're not careful we will push harder and harder, go faster and faster, trying to do more and more, in order to be seen as successful in the eyes of someone else, which can result in exhaustion, anxiety, and depression. Another temptation is to be seen by others in terms of not just who we are but what we own. The marketing industry spends over \$15 billion a year trying to tell young adults what they think young adults need in order to make themselves happy. There's a tendency to measure ourselves in comparison to others and marketers and advertisers are very smart and happy to exploit this.

Mark talked last week about using the gifts that God has given us to the best of our abilities. The most important thing we need to understand is to make sure that we're using these gifts to further the Kingdom and not try to impress ourselves and others, and not to exhaust ourselves and run ourselves into the ground. We work hard but what are we doing to honor God's commandment for us to rest and observe Sabbath?

Now you might be sitting there on your couch or at your table thinking, "Well, Rich is retired now; it's easy for him to talk about keeping the Sabbath. You have a point and you're right to say that my life has changed since I stopped working. When I was working I worked like a dog. During all the years of work I never observed the Sabbath, not once in 32 years at Ford. Not one time could I ever say I'm taking a Sabbath on this day.

When I had school on top of my work the last two years it was even more stressful and I found that I was literally wearing myself out. It wasn't until early this year that I started practicing a weekly Sabbath as part of an assignment in my Pastoral Ministry class. In this particular course, we were all urged to begin a spiritual practice that we hadn't done before. The intent was to take part in a practice that would help us close a gap in our lives or to address some spiritual aspect that was missing.

Since I was feeling so drained, I felt the Sabbath would be good to try. Studying full time in seminary is no walk in the park, as Emily, Ashley and Mark can tell you. It doesn't matter what degree in ministry you earn, it's hard, it's a grind. When I began observing the Sabbath I found it initially difficult to commit to a day away from my studies. I found it difficult not to fall behind. I was worried about my assignments. I was worried about my grades, and I was worried about what my professors would think, as well as my colleagues, my friends and family.

For a lot of reasons I was very uncomfortable in the beginning, kind of stepping away from my studies on Sunday. It took me weeks to get comfortable with observing the Sabbath. How I got comfortable depended a lot on how I spent the rest of my week. I had to get disciplined the other six days so that I knew I could take that day off. What I discovered after a few weeks was that I wasn't so worried about this day I had to take off and how it would impact my studies. I actually started looking forward to a day where I could rest and reflect, where I had some time for myself to exercise and when I had time to worship God.

I understand that we're all at different points in our lives. Some of us are at the start of our careers, some are at the middle, while some are at the end. Some are supporting young kids that have sports and activities, and some of us are busy caring for parents. You might remember that Dawn and I spent a lot of time traveling throughout the U.S. and Canada, supporting Isaac's love for hockey. So I get it! I really get it when we talk about Sabbath and how we can think about it as another task that we have in an already busy and over-committed schedule. How in the world are we going to be able to fit this in?

Maybe a way to think about how to incorporate Sabbath in our lives, is it's like thinking about how we get back on a bike after we haven't ridden for a long time. Now if we went out with Pat Murphy on our very first ride, we might find ourselves in Petoskey for lunch. That's a little bit like taking a Sabbath for an entire day if you haven't done it before! Maybe if we went out with Pat Murphy for a ride from the church parking lot to the Dairy King or to the Dairy-Go-Round, that would be a better way to start getting back into this activity.

Any change in our daily routine is hard! None of us like it and it's oftentimes hard to get used to change. So if you haven't ever practiced the full Sabbath, maybe commit to it in segments. Throughout the week find ten minutes in your day to read scripture, reflect, be silent with God, be in God's presence. Set an alarm on your phone so that those times don't get away from you. If you commute, turn the radio off, sit in silence with God in a traffic jam. Just be with God, pray with God. Spend that time as a break from the world to be with God. Go for a walk around the neighborhood during this quiet time to recognize the mastery of God's creation. Look for God hiding in plain sight all around you. Each of us finds that our minds drift a little bit. Center yourself, remind yourself in God's presence and carry on.

It isn't right for me to pretend that I have all the answers related to Sabbath and what everyone should do. I *can* tell you what's worked for me and that has been to commit to a time that includes rest, some exercise, and worship. I urge you to prayerfully consider discovering or rediscovering the Sabbath in a way that's meaningful to you personally and brings you into a deeper relationship with God. We spent a lot of time thinking about the Sabbath this morning, but it's important because Sabbath establishes a foundation for us in terms of how we're able to relate to a new creation in Christ.

In our second scripture reading that Ashley read this morning we read these words from Paul to the church in Corinth from verse 17:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

We spoke about creation being made perfect in the Sabbath and it was perfect all the way up to when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, because God has always desired for us to be in relationship with Him. A new creation was required in order to reestablish the bond between ourselves and with God. In this sinful world the strength of our relationship, the strength of our bond with God, depends on how we answer this next question. Is who you are more important to you than *whose you are*? That is, is who you are, how you see yourself, how you define yourself, more important than whose you are, God's beloved child justified through the faithfulness of Christ?

We know the right answer and at the same time we know we are human beings that are imperfect. So how do we come to an understanding of whose we are, of how we should define ourselves? We come to this understanding because of God's desire to reestablish our relationship with him through Jesus. It is *in, and through, Christ* that God works to repair our brokenness.

From verse 19:

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

It's important for us to remember that any brokenness of ours isn't something too big for God to handle. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent perfection. The rest of the characters in the Bible are flawed in some way.

Mary Magdalene, whom we know from our own Bible studies, is a character that's portrayed in a new series about Jesus called *The Chosen*. You can find 'The Chosen' online or you can find it through Peacock if you have Xfinity. There's one scene in particular between Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene that speaks of God's love for us in Jesus.

In this scene Nicodemus sees Mary in the marketplace. Earlier in the series, it was Nicodemus that tried to kill the demons that he saw Mary possessed by, but to no avail, because of the strength of the demons that resided within her. He doesn't understand how she's able to walk around the marketplace completely healed, so he presses her to tell him who healed her and how it happened. Mary explains that it wasn't anything that Nicodemus said or did. She said it was someone else that healed her. Mary can't explain who performed this miracle, as she doesn't know Jesus by name yet. She explains to Nicodemus what she knows saying, "I was one way and now I'm completely different, and the thing that happened in between was him." And then she finishes by saying, "And yes I will know him for the rest of my life."

Mary Magdalene had identified herself before she was healed as everyone else identified her, as someone that was looked down upon and as someone that didn't have value or worth. It was only after Jesus healed her that she recognized the fact that *whose* she was was more important than who she was. It was something she would remember for the rest of her life.

My brothers and sisters, we've been given an opportunity to be reconciled with God through Jesus Christ! How we use that gift and how we share that gift is up to us and us alone. We can go through this life seeking to be Number 1, feeling like the world revolves around us. We can run ourselves ragged gathering up whatever we think we need to make people see us in a way that society values. We can chase the carrot the world puts before us or we can go through this life seeking first to develop a deeper relationship with God, that then influences how we live our lives and how we interact with others. The key to understanding *whose* we are is in the Sabbath. If we're going to affectively follow Christ in our lives, we need to commit to spending time with Him.

I pray that you will seek to continue developing your relationship with our heavenly Father through the practice of Sabbath or many Sabbaths, and that your faith will be strengthened to be Christ's ambassador in this world to all you meet and all you do. Amen, and thanks be to God.

Rev. Ashley — Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

Friends let us pray. Gracious and loving God, in this moment we give space for silence in order to rest in your presence, to attune ourselves to your voice, to delight in your majesty, and to humble ourselves in your glory.

In the midst of our busy lives and demanding schedules, we ask that you would lead us beside still waters, that you would seat us at your table, that you would give rest to our weary souls. Develop in us a renewed understanding of your work, of your sacrifice, and of your mission. Remind us of our calling to be your children. Instill in us a desire to serve you more than this world, call us into spaces of rest, and transform us into a new creation.

Father God, on this particular day we especially want to lift up the men in our lives. For the fathers who are still with us and for those who have passed away, for those who have fathered us, some in addition to our own fathers, and some in place of absent ones, we give thanks. We give thanks for all the men who have showed us what it means to live by your grace and truth, for those who have cared for us so well. We also want to lift up all who struggle to find joy on this Father's Day, for those who have feelings of resentment, loss, disappointment, guilt, anger, sadness, ambivalence and grief. We thank you for these men as well, your sons and our brothers.

We thank you for being our heavenly Father. We ask that you would unite us as the family of God now, as we pray the words that you have taught us to say,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Dr. Jerry Smith, Director of Music sings "*Here I Am, Lord*"
(Sharon K. Smith, Accompanist)

Rev. Ashley – Benediction and Blessing

Friends, as we leave this worship space today, may we carve out intentional space for rest and for Sabbath. In that space may we continue to ponder what it means that in Christ we are a new creation. And as we engage in Sabbath rest, may we remember who we are, that we are beloved children of God.

And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. And may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and forever give you peace. Amen.