

How to Be Human: A Jubilee Spirituality for All of Us - Sabbath Rest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 August 2023

Preacher: Matt Collinson

[0 : 00] All right. So my name is Tonetta, and I am one of the pastors here at the Table Church. And I want to take this opportunity basically to double down on what Kim said. So one, I'm going to talk a little bit about serving today, and then I'm going to frame our sermon today because we're going to do something a little bit different. So if you've been around at all in the past few weeks, you probably recognize that we've been talking about serving a lot more on Sundays and in our social media, that we're trying to invite each of you, all of us, into a fuller experience of serving. And as Kim said, that's what these cards are for. As we continue to seek a morning space to host a morning worship service, and as we reflect on what it means to grow in maturity as a Christian church, we're realizing that increasing the number of folks giving their time and their gifts is foundational to this being a healthy place. This is a place, you know, you come here week after week. This is a place that is fundamentally about spiritual formation, about deepening love of God and love of neighbor and love of ourselves. We come here week after week to tether our stories to the story of Jesus Christ. And that story, the story of Jesus Christ, is completely from beginning to end about serving. By giving our time and our gifts, we become people expressing the incarnate love that Jesus embodied. By practicing self-giving in a place that is familiar, we get the opportunity to be formed and become more able to practice that same self-giving love in places that don't feel as comfortable. To put it simply, you're invited to practice your discipleship here among your kin for your own sake and for the good of this church.

Now, as I've been thinking about this, talking about this this past couple of weeks, I've realized there's one thing I haven't said very clearly, and that is that many of you serving have been burned and burned out by serving in previous churches. Y'all are really quiet on that, but I know that that is the case.

Mish, our staff administrative kind of guru, is working alongside our directors to create position descriptions for each ministry volunteer position.

Because we hope that by setting very clear expectations, and especially by creating check-in points and time frames for serving, that we can make serving a joy.

We want all of our teams in this church to be about community building first. So that we can set up relational rhythms that are rooted in covenant rather than contract.

[3 : 29] And then at the end of the day, we hope to create a culture of service that leads to life and connection and relationship. The other thing that came to me is, you know, we've been talking about this, is that I haven't said much about this perception, perhaps, that we're not a huge church, so maybe there's a sense that there's not a lot of places to serve.

Well, I want you to know that there are plenty of places to serve. So as Kim said, we would love more people on the worship team up here and in Table Kids and in First Impressions and in our community ministry and in our ministry of justice and compassion.

And those are some of the most visible places in this church that you can serve. And we need you to serve in those spaces because we need the voices of all the people in here to create this beautiful representation of what we're all about.

But there are also these opportunities that I realize that folks don't know as much about that I want to say a few things about. So I would love for a few people to serve in our community ministry as coordinators of fun, fun coordinators, so that we can go out and actually practice joy communally, can practice joy together.

I would love for there to be a few people who are families coordinators so we can go to the water park or go out as families and create that village that we need to raise our kids well.

[5 : 05] So if that's you, there's a place for you. I also dream of people signing up in droves to do what Zach did today. To, yes, to pray before our community, but also to write the prayers.

There's a little bit of a writer in me, y'all, and I dream of this being a place where artists and writers can create liturgy and can write our service of Holy Communion in all kinds of different ways. And I dream of there being people up here who are available for prayer just because they're excited about it and want to be available for people. Maybe even a little less visible.

I dream about photographers and graphic designers and content creators joining our comms team so that people know more about this thing that we're doing here.

And then, this is what I feel like is my wildest imagining. I dream of people more and more joining our worship production team.

[6 : 12] In the back of the next one. We invite folks who are gifted in things like sound, tech, and media, and all of those things to join us.

If you just want to learn about those things to join. If you want to come and set up a little early, because I come in here, y'all, and I'm bumbling with this stuff. It is not my gifting. But if you just coming and setting up the stage or staying to tear down the stage gives our musicians rest.

The last thing I'll say is that this past week I pulled a quote about the South African concept of Ubuntu from one of my heroes, Desmond Tutu.

It was for our social media. And here's what it said. I hope some of you saw it. He said, my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours.

We belong in a bundle of life. We say a person is a person through other persons. It is not, I think, therefore I am.

[7 : 27] Ubuntu says, rather, I am human because I belong. I participate. I share. We talk a lot here about this place as a place of radical belonging.

But I deeply pray that we also become a place of radical participation. It's through participation rather than consumption alone that we live into our humanity.

It's through self-giving service that we follow the path of Jesus. So, yeah, the cars are in your seats. You're always free to answer the invitation to serve.

But I pray that you would give it again this week some consideration. Okay. Okay. The next thing I want to do, and you can give those at the end if you want to do that to the First Impressions staff volunteers.

The next thing I want to do after, you know, giving a little exhortation to serve is just to set up what we're about to do. So, our speaker for today, our preacher for today, because of health concerns, was not able to be present, is not able to be present.

[8 : 45] So, Matt, Matt Collinson, shared with us a video. In the middle of the week, he had done such good work on this. We really wanted to bring it to you as we kind of end summer.

Does anybody feel like summer is ending a little bit this week? I have a son, so, who's going to school. Somebody who said thanks. So, this feels like a threshold moment.

So, to end our series on Jubilee Spirituality and How to Be Human, Matt is going to end it talking about rest in this video. And then afterward, to make sure this doesn't feel so impersonal, we're going to talk to each other in small groups.

Feel free if you need a mask for that. There are, I think, some outside. But just for about 10 minutes to make sure that we're able to really hear what Matt had to say about rest as we enter some new rhythms.

All right. So, after this, I will come back up here. Set us up into groups. Good evening, Table Church.

[9 : 52] For those of you who don't know me that well, my name is Matt Collinson. I'm a part of the preaching team at the table, and I've actually been in the church since 2015, believe it or not.

So, I want to apologize that I am not with you in person tonight. And I'm, in fact, just literally a projection. Unfortunately, my wife tested positive for COVID this week.

So far, touch everything you can find. I haven't caught it or am not showing any symptoms. And have so far been tested negative.

But it seemed safer for everyone that I just stay home and send you this recording instead. So, tonight is our final sermon in the series on how to be human.

Jubilee spirituality for all of us. Tonight, we're going to talk about rest, Sabbath rest, and how that is a crucial part of our humanity, and how it guides us towards embracing a spirituality of jubilee.

[10:54] So, we're going to be in Exodus 20 and a little bit of Exodus 31. But before we open our Bibles or before you open everything I want your Bible at, let's take a brief moment.

Jesus, this is hard sometimes. It's hard to talk about rest. It's hard to admit that we need rest. It's hard to fight against forces and powers that don't want us to rest.

I pray that this evening you would guide us into your heaven with rest. I pray that at the end of this we would know what it means to acknowledge our humanity and our need for rest, and to know that you care about us and love us.

Amen. Amen. Okay, so let's begin in Exodus chapter 20, starting at verse 8.

Those of you who have that open may see that we are right in the middle of the Ten Commandments, and that the commandment about Sabbath is the fourth of the ten. And so Exodus 20 verse 8, the middle of the Ten Commandments, reads this.

[12:07] Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it home. For six days you shall labor and do all of your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work, not you, your son, your daughter, your male or female servants, your animals, or any foreigner residing in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and made it home.

A couple of chapters later we see this commandment expanded upon. So if you want to flip forward to Exodus 31, beginning at really just verses 16 and 17. The Lord said to Moses that the Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for generations to come as a lasting covenant.

It will be a sign between God and the Israelites forever. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh they rested and were refreshed.

[13:19] I want to start by pointing out that when we read these two passages, both Exodus 20 and Exodus 31, we're reminded that on the seventh day God will rest.

I don't want to get into a theological conversation tonight about whether or not God needs rest in the way that we understand it as humans, but I do want to explore the word that is used to describe the rest that God engaged in.

The Hebrew word is *norfash*, which is translated roughly as to take a breath, to restore oneself, to breathe.

I think there's something very powerful about thinking about rest, restoration, and creators, and creator God engaging in that rest as taking a breath.

Both that deep exhale of, the day is done. And then that inhale of, see what's been created, see what's out there, see what we can smell.

[14:32] So I want you to picture with me, close your eyes if it helps, but picture with me, if you will, God on that first Sabbath day, stopped, taking in that deep, restorative breath, smelling the smells of creation, admiring the world and all that they had made, taking that moment of delight in that exhale of, this is good.

Imagine God leaning into their Trinitarian relationship, their joy in creation, and literally breathing out, breathing in. Whether or not God needs rest, that's a powerful image of what it looks like to rest, to be restored, and to be at peace.

There's a Jewish rabbi by the name of Abraham Heschel who wrote a book, or the book really, on Sabbath about 20 years ago, where he describes Sabbath as a discipline of stepping back from the day to day, taking time to literally be at peace, to breathe, to experience creator, creation.

Rabbi Nehemiah Polan takes it one step further and says, literally says that on the Sabbath, we get a taste of what it means to return to Eden. The Sabbath brings us healing and healing.

On the Sabbath day, we know that paradise, that Eden, that heaven are not lost. So, Sabbath isn't just lying in bed on Sunday and then maybe going to church.

[16:23] Sabbath is an act of engaging with the world as we believe it to be, the world as it could be, seeing that picture of heaven, taking those deep breaths to experience and fully lean into the place that we are and also the place that we want to be.

Sabbath is a discipline. I also want to say that I do not believe necessarily that Sabbath is required to be one whole day.

Maybe we can take Sabbath rest throughout the week. Maybe we can take that Sabbath rest in different spaces. But it's not just collapsing and being tired. Sabbath rest is an active, intentional engagement with our community, with God, with creation, taking those deep, restorative breaths.

I think this is so important for those of us like me who work in justice-seeking or healing spaces because I think sometimes we need to pause and be reminded of the world we're seeking to create. We need to be reminded of the vision of paradise, the vision of heaven that our justice work is seeking to bring about. There's, you know, not a deal of point in being an environmental activist locked in an office Monday through Saturday if on Sunday we don't step outside and see the environment we're fighting for.

[17 : 46] There's not a deal of point in fighting for our client's wellness if at the end of the day we ourselves are not well. So please don't mishear what I'm saying here.

I'm not saying that we should stop engaging with our justice work just because it's Sunday or just because we're engaging in rest, but that the practice of liberation, that our practice of justice-seeking must include being in spaces where we have the opportunity to envision or experience the justice that we're seeking to bring.

We need that Sabbath rest to step back from the emails, the training, the monotony, the constant demands on our time to breathe and acknowledge and remember what it is that we're fighting for. And I will be very honest at this point, this vision of rest is very much aspirational for me, but I have been over the last few months on a journey of trying to understand what I need for rest and restoration.

So I want to take you through a little bit of my journey towards what it means to rest, to what it means to be restored, and I also want to spend a good amount of time on structural impediments to rest because there are many.

[19 : 01] And I think that the commandments of the Sabbath have something to say to us uniquely about what it means to have structural rest as well as individual rest. So when I started this process, it was because my therapist asked me a question, as is so often the case.

When my therapist asked, what do you do to rest? What does rest and restoration look like? And I'm sure many of you have been in that situation where you've sort of looked down at the floor and looked up sheepishly and said, I know that I really know what it means to rest there are things that I enjoy that are sort of restful.

I quite like watching soccer on a Saturday morning. I like spending time with my wife. I have been known to sleep in on occasion. But that's not really what they were asking.

They weren't asking, what do you do to overcome exhaustion? What do you do to get back to a place where you can function for the rest of the week? What they were asking was how do you restore?

How do you breathe? How do you create space? So for the past few months I have explored some things to do that are restorative. Some have been good, some have been less so.

[20 : 12] But I want to encourage us to think about rest as a restorative act, not as sort of a passive lying down couch. That may be necessary.

In some cases, it may be necessary first to overcome exhaustion before we can engage in restoration. But for many of us, I think we need to get out into nature. Do something artistic. Take an improv class. Visit a museum. Hang out with friends. Read a good book. Do things that are actively restoring us. Playing on our creativity.

Engaging different parts of our mind. Making us do things that we're not good at. For fun. We're going to talk about restorative play, which is one of the table's values in a sermon later on into the fall.

So I don't want to dig into this too much. But I want us to think about, as we walk away from here, what is it that I need to do to rest? What do I need to do? What activities, what do I engage in that is restorative?

[21 : 13] But I will say that even after identifying and trying out some of these restorative practices and feeling restored by doing some of them, they didn't magically become a routine. They didn't become a habit.

So I was left with a second question, which is, why don't I rest? Even if I know the things that I want to do to be restored, why don't I do them regularly?

And I've discovered a couple of things about myself in this journey. One is that I have this longstanding belief that I am only useful to people if I'm doing something for them. I can't just be in a space and be with people.

Then they'll discover who I am. But if I do a bunch of things for them, then they'll keep me around. And that, I have discovered, is a huge impediment to rest. If you assume that the very act of no longer doing something will cause everyone to not want to hang out with you anymore. It's not true, and I am aware that that is not true, but it's a hard lesson to unlearn. It's deeply ingrained. I know other folks, maybe we carry some baggage related to wrapping our identity up in our work, be it our career, or just be it needing to be there to heal, there to teach, there to guide, there to welcome.

[22 : 28] And if we stop doing that and then just be, just breathe, we begin to have an identity crisis. What am I? I'm not writing. What am I?

The other significant personal impediment that I've found to rest is that I can convince myself that I'm okay.

I don't actually need to rest. There are other people that need it more. Let me take on their responsibility so that they can rest. I'm okay. I'll rest next morning. Sleep at the end of the semester. Retire at 90 and rest then. And this isn't just a work thing. I think it can show up in relationships too. It can involve us taking on burdens in friendships, in relationships, in family dynamics that either aren't ours to carry or that are actually stopping us rest.

Oh, I'm so worried about my, you know, parents' relationship. I need to invest emotional labor in it because, you know, my relationships are great. Let me invest in my parents' emotional relationships.

[23 : 34] Just because our relationships are okay when we start doesn't mean they are when we finish. engaging in other people's labor. Part of being human is needing to rest and be restored.

And frankly, the truth of being human is that when our body says we need to rest, we are past the point of needing to rest. When our body says, hey, you gotta stop, we are too far gone. We are not getting that back. Building in a practice of restorative time, restorative rest, restorative rest, keeps us human, keeps us engaged in community, keeps us focused on that vision of justice for the future.

But, I want to say this, I have done a lot of self-reflection, learned a lot about myself, discovered some of these unhealthy thoughts I have about rest.

But even if I am utterly convinced that, one, I am never going to fully overcome those barriers that I just laid out, but even if I did, there are structural, societal barriers in place that prevent us from engaging in rest.

[24 : 45] And I want to pull this back to the Sabbath because you notice in the Sabbath that the Sabbath is a command. It is a command for the Jewish people. You will rest on the seventh day.

No one is to work. If people work, they are to be expelled from the community. This is a, societal obligation that we rest.

And if you contrast that with our society today, that is not how we're set up. In fact, we're set up the opposite way. We are set up so that people who don't rest are actively rewarded.

We elevate the grind, get a side hustle, have another gig, have multiple streams of income. That's work. It's not rest.

The reality is that our society has set up the exact opposite of how the Jewish society was envisioned when Moses got the Ten Commandments. Those who do not rest are rewarded.

[25 : 48] Those who can eke out an advantage because they don't need to rest or because they don't have to rest gain an advantage over those of us that do. Lisa Shannon Harper explores this point in a sermon on Jubilee where she points out that literally the Sabbath is an antidote to empire and oppression because if you're working 24-7 or you're busy 24-7, you don't get a chance to stop and notice, hey, I'm being exploited.

I'm working too much. I'm tired. If we are constantly grinding, constantly hustling, constantly doing all of these extra things, we don't have a chance to notice this isn't what I was meant to be.

This isn't enjoyable. We don't have a chance to get angry at the injustice of how we're being treated because we don't have time to stop and notice that we're being treated unjustly. We don't have time to look at the world around us and say this is not how the world is meant to be because we're so damn physically.

linked to that, I think, is that in many cases we can't afford to rest.

Not only is society not set up for us to rest, but in many cases we can't afford to. And that may be we can't afford to because whilst our company policy may say you don't send emails after five

o'clock, what happens in reality is most of the work gets done at seven o'clock in the evening when everyone's at home.

[27 : 19] And if you don't engage in that, you are harming your career. You are harming your potential to get promoted in the organization, but frankly, even to stay in the organization. They're not going to say that you're fired because you're not working at eight o'clock at night, but they can say that your performance is below that of all of your colleagues.

And the reason for that is that all of your colleagues are working when they should be resting. What if we flipped that? What if we rewarded people who rested? What if we said, hey, you can't get promoted unless you use your vacation days?

But the reason we don't is because we have decided that corporate lack of investment, that a lack of corporate planning, a lack of, you know, understanding what people need to do their jobs, how many people are required to do a given job, is not the responsibility of the corporation, it's the responsibility of the people doing the work.

Corporate has decided that this job takes three people. therefore, if three people aren't enough, that means you're not working hard enough. Not actually, this is a 15-person job and the fact that everyone isn't able to do it is completely human and rational.

We have put it on the individuals to say, well, you're just not working hard enough. And that is rewarded because some people can. Some people can keep going. Some people know. Some people don't need a bunch of sleep.

[28 : 37] Some people can sleep four or five hours a night and be fine. That is not most people, but if there's one of them on your team, suddenly that's the standard for the rest of us. And for some of us, we can't afford to rest because we literally can't afford to.

We have set up a society where most people cannot afford an unexpected \$400 payment. We have created a society where in order to make ends meet, you don't just need to work a regular job.

You need to freelance. You need to have a side hustle. You need to drive Uber on the weekends. If we allow for our society to give us work that lasts us during the week that doesn't pay enough to meet our needs or doesn't have a system in place that allows one job to pay for what we need, people can't rest.

And again, we are trapped in that cycle. I need to work this extra job. I need to take this extra shift. I need to do this extra thing allows us not to notice that, hey, this isn't right.

The person making all the money off this is currently on a yacht drinking champagne, claiming that they're working hard. I am working 75 hours a week and not seeing my children in order for them to have another yacht.

[29 : 53] That is unjust. And Sabbath is a bullock against that injustice. It allows us to rest, see ourselves for who we are and see the world for what it is.

So what would society look like if we were different? What would our society look like if things like wage theft, requiring people to work extra hours and not paying them, were as socially unacceptable as shoplifting?

How would it look like if people were actually rewarded for resting, who were incentivized to take vacation, structures were built that allowed for people to take time off without sinking the entire organization?

And Pastor Anthony's sabbatical. The church hasn't folded. We're all still here because we planned it. We thought about it. What do we need to do? How do we need to do it? But we also recognized that our pastor needed a sabbatical.

So we built something that allowed for that to happen. How transformative would our society be if people only needed to work one job to have their needs met? If we had everything in place that allowed for people to say, I will work six days, I will work five days, I will work however many days and that will meet my needs and I will rest.

[31 : 10] And I want us to leave with this question. How can the church be leaders in this if we take Sabbath rest as something that was structurally built into the commandments that God gave Moses that society would build in this block against empire and oppression, exploitation, overworking people?

How can the church be a part of pushing back? How can we be a part of the fight for fair wages, for true Sabbath, for necessary social supports so that as a society we can rest and stop being exploited?

I want to leave with the words of Jesus in John chapter 10 where he promises us that he came, that we would have life and life in all of its fullness.

Part of the fullness of life is rest. It is human to rest. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, give us the vision and the wisdom to see your Sabbath as a tool for preventing oppression and not a stick to beat people with when they want to take a break.

Guide us into structural and systemic solutions to create space for rest for all of you. In your name we pray. Amen.

[32 : 36] All right. So what we're going to do now, I think it's pretty important to have some response time.

It's going to be pretty short just to make sure I know it's after six so we're going to shorten it a little bit. But I think rest as we enter into a season where many folks are going back to school or entering new phases of their jobs, thinking about how you're going to continue to rest is extremely important. So there are going to be some questions on the screen here. I'm going to ask you to do the first one. Okay? So, and if you want to take pictures to reflect on the rest, take a picture on your phone, I welcome that.

Just the first question, get into a group, maybe with some people you don't know as well, for about five minutes. Introduce yourself, give your pronouns, and then just talk about that first question and think about what rest might look like for you just in this next season as we go into the fall.

If you're on the live stream, there will be a Google room, a meetup room for you that I'm going to pop into. Okay? So about five minutes and then we'll get into communion. Thank you. All right.

[34 : 14] . All right.