

**Sermon**  
**8 February 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Exodus 20:1-17**

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When I was a student, I loved everything about university, apart from the exams. Despite the fact that I worked really hard, I used to find the day before I wrote a paper very stressful. And if I had a paper scheduled for a Monday, I was always in two minds as to whether I should go to church or rather stay at home and study. Until one day my dad said: “Nanda, if you choose to go to church, God will make the hours you need to finish studying last longer.”

And although that was just a figure of speech, it changed my perspective on time completely. Because in reality I would only be away from my books for a couple of hours if I went to church, and I would come home fresh, revitalized and full of energy, ready to take in lots more facts and concentrate better. To be honest, if I stayed at home, I would probably have wasted those two hours on silly wee things anyway.

So although going to church didn't literally give me more time to study, it made me use the time I had better, it helped me to focus.

I think that was a very wise lesson my dad taught me! Going to church is never a waste of the little precious time that you've got; it's actually the

most important thing on your weekly calendar. Because if you *start* your week right, things can only get better from there onwards.

As you all know by now, in our Stewardship programme this month, we are focusing on time. Throughout the month we are going to talk about *time for God, time for other people, time for the church*, as well as *time for work and time for leisure*. And it is the last two themes I want to focus on today. Time for church and time for work and leisure.

Our Scripture lesson this morning was the 10 commandments.

The people of God had an agreement with him – that they would dedicate their lives to him if He would please take care of them. But they struggled to keep *their* end of this agreement.

So to make it a wee bit easier for them, God gave them the 10 commandments. Rules that spelled out how they could honour God through their lives.

These commandments served as a fence or a boundary. As long as they obeyed the commandments, they would be safe within the parameter of “*his people*”, but if they disobeyed these rules they were crossing a boundary into the unknown. And there, outside these borders, they would have to face the consequences of their actions themselves. If they stayed *within* the borders, however, they would experience a sense of belonging, they would be respected and cared for.

So coming back to time, the rule I want to take a wee look at this morning is the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, the one about the Sabbath. God said:

“Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the 7<sup>th</sup> day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor anybody else...”

It is quite interesting to notice that the reason given for us to rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, is because we are told in the creation story that God made the earth in 6 days, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day He rested.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> day God made people. So *our* first day on earth was to be one of devotion to God. That’s how we started life here on earth, that’s how we should start our week, every week.

When I was a child, the community I lived in took the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment quite literally, which meant that on a Sunday we were not allowed out on our bikes, all the shops were closed and only the doctors, nurses, policeman and fire fighters were allowed to work.

And that’s *all* it was ever about. We were not allowed to “work” on a Sunday.

But I think it’s about more than that.

For starters – the Jewish Sabbath as described here in the 10 commandments is a Saturday, not a Sunday. But we Christians changed the day of the Lord to a Sunday, because that’s the day Jesus rose from the dead, so we want to celebrate this as a community of believers.

But the same principle still applies – 6 days you work and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day you rest.

But the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is not only about how we should spend a Sunday. The first half of that sentence says: 6 days you should *work!*

To me it often feels as if we are placing so much emphasis on the 1 day we have to rest, discussing how we should do that and what is allowed and what not, that we completely forget about the 6 days to work! Because these are equally important!

There is a time for work and a time for leisure. And only if you work for 6 days, you deserve to rest on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

It's not literally about working for 6 days and resting for a 7<sup>th</sup> though, it's about giving your best when you are working, but then also realising that if you really work hard you'll need a break, you'll need a little change of routine, to give you the energy to do your best again.

And what better time to take a break than on a Sunday, when we can come to the house of God and spend time with him? When we can stop with the crazy business of every day and just feel God's peace surrounding us, remembering that he is in charge of our lives?

Because if we don't deliberately take time out to spend with God, our relationship with him is going to suffer for it, because before we wipe out our eyes another year will be gone. And then another.

And working on our relationship with God is not something we can leave for doing "one day" when we have time. Because when will that be?! I've heard many a retired person tell me that although they thought retirement was going to be a time of rest, they are now busier than ever!

So what does the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment say then? It says that we have to make the most of our time. We need to be focused and work hard when we work, but we need to remember that life is about more than work. We need rest too. So let's rest well when we rest. Both work and rest are important. We're not made to work all the time, but we've not been made to rest all the time either.

If you don't rest well, you won't be able to work well. And if you don't work well, you won't be able to live well.

So let's get our diaries out and write down all the things we *need* to do, all the work that has to get done, but let's also include time to rest, time to do special things with our friends and family. Because it is these things that make us who we are...

And most importantly – let's start our week in the church. Let's rest here, where we can experience actual peace. Where we can take a little time out of our busy schedules and just sit and listen to God, and talk to him, and worship him. I can't think of a better way and a better place to get perspective on my life than in church.

And if you come here regularly, and get perspective on your life every time, just think how much more sense your life will make to you!

God gave us a day to spend with him. A day to forget about all the other things we are busy with every day, and just to focus on him. This may mean different things to different people, and that's okay, as long as we use this day to spend with God, because that is what it was intended for.

It's almost like charging the battery of your mobile phone – once it's fully charged, it can last a while before it needs charged again. So come get “charged” here in church! We all know that a phone with a flat battery is worth absolutely nothing.

Just like that we people won't be able to fulfil our purpose here on earth if our spiritual batteries are flat...

Let's force ourselves to not *run* through life, but to stop often. After all, life is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And if we stop often to take a drink of the Living Water, we'll be able to keep going to the very end.

Even if we have to change our running shoes for something more comfortable in time, and even if we have to change our comfy shoes for slippers in time – as long as we take time out to spend with God, he'll keep us going, until one day we reach our destination, where we'll have peace and rest, forever.

Nobody buys a mobile phone and throws away the charger, because the charger is an essential part of the phone. Let's choose not to throw away the opportunity to spend time with God, because, like my dad said, that will make the rest of the hours we have last longer!

Amen