

West Branch Friends Meeting
August 25, 2019
Sue McCracken, Pastor
“Why Don’t we Rest Anymore, and What’s Hygge?”

I don’t often start my messages with a funny joke, but when I read this one, I knew it had a place in this particular message, so here goes!

A pastor decided to skip church and go play golf one Sunday. He told his assistant he wasn’t feeling well, and then drove to a golf course in another city where no one would know him. He teed off on the first hole and a gust of wind caught the ball and sailed it an extra 100 yards, right into the cup! An angel saw what had happened and asked God, “What’d you do that for?” and God just smiled and said, “Who’s he gonna tell?”

I’ve decided it’s not only the pastor who occasionally needs a break, but it seems like there are so many more events on Sundays now that keep us from being in worship. I’ve kept track of summer church attendance going back six years, and I’ve been a little alarmed that this summer has had the lowest average attendance since I started compiling the data. So of course, as the pastor, my ego wants to know if it’s something I’ve said, or done that’s the problem!

So here are some thoughts on the subject that I want to probe today: what has happened to the idea of Sunday being a day of rest, and thus why is attendance so low this summer, and what should be our response to that commandment for one day of rest? So I’ll start with the question about Sunday being a day of rest, and share this familiar scripture from Exodus 20:8-11:

***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor 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 he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*”**

Although these are probably the most oft-quoted verses about the Sabbath, there are actually 40 references throughout scripture about keeping the Sabbath holy. Such as this one in the New Testament:

Hebrews 4: 9-11a "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from God's work. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest."

The early Quakers followed this commandment to the letter – women prepared all the First Day (as they called Sunday) meals on the Seventh Day (Saturday), and the only work men did was to take care of any animals they might have had.

And if I think back to my childhood days in the 50's, and 60's, I remember thinking Sunday was the most boring day of the week because all my parents wanted to do after the noon meal was take naps! Even when we had kids of our own, Sundays consisted of church, lunch, naps, and more church! And I know my kids were probably as bored as I was growing up. But now? Wow...it's really hard to keep that commandment like so many families did in the past, and no longer will you hear sermons on the sins of working on Sundays (for which I am grateful).

Yes, our culture has changed, some things for the better, some I'm thinking not so much. Most restaurants and stores are now open on Sundays, and I guess that means there are more job opportunities, but it also means that if my day of rest is on Sunday, and I choose to eat at a restaurant, or stop at a store to pick up a few things, it's at the expense of someone else's day of rest (even though I might hope these Sunday workers would have another day of the week to rest, I'm pretty doubtful that is actually happening).

The question I have to ask myself is simply, "Do *I* really set aside one day out of seven to rest?" I think it's something we all would probably have to give some serious thought to because physicians will tell you rest is essential for physical health; athletes will tell you rest is needed for essential muscles to repair themselves and prevent injury; and philosophers are adamant that rest is essential for the mind.

Leonardo da Vinci said, ***“Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer.”***

And even more importantly, ask most religious leaders and they will tell you rest is essential for the soul. Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha’i, among others, teach the importance of setting aside a period of time for rest. Our souls require rest, too.

So, OK, we need rest. But how in the world do we get that one day set aside when families have kids in sports that have numerous weekend activities, often after the parents have both worked all week, or if we have jobs that demand our attention 24/7 (even for something like parenting).

Joshua Becker has some suggestions for us. He says we can:

- Find contentment in our current life. Society often persuades us we will be happier with more money, more power, or better skills – things that swallow up our time. But what if we stopped focusing on what we don’t have and started enjoying the things we do? Really following our Quaker testimony of simplicity by embracing a lifestyle that focuses on our values, not our possessions?
- We may have to diligently plan our rest. We have to learn to say no to any tasks that attempt to take precedence. True rest is different from just not working, however. We will need to choose creative activities that are refreshing and encourage relationships.
- What would happen if one day a week we avoided housework, planned meals in advance, and turned off the TV, and electronics? And if we include our families, or our friends, in our day of rest, it will be much easier to practice concentrated rest if others doing it with us.

Now I want to introduce a new term to you – well, it was new to me, anyway – and that’s the term ‘hygge’ (pronounced hue guh) which comes from the Danes. This was a new term for me, but I learned I can go on Amazon and buy a book titled [The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living](#) if I want to know how the Danes do it!

Jonas Ellison says hygge is about old baggy sweaters, wool socks with holes in them, unscented candles, and your grandparent's blanket. It's about rustic materials, small spaces, hand-made items, warm drinks, and slow food. It's a feeling we sometimes have in the winter here in Iowa when we have the chance to snuggle under a blanket and drink hot chocolate when there's a raging snowstorm outside.

It's more than 'things,' though; it's about setting an intention in our lives about warmth, togetherness, comfort, and coziness. Hygge is NOT staring at our phones all day (I am probably a bit guilty of that), not hibernating indoors alone all winter, not following a strict to-do schedule, or buying something we don't need, but want, because it's trendy (also guilty at times).

When I looked up the definition of hygge, I read:

“Hygge is a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment.”

And I thought – well, that's how I often feel meeting here with all of you on Sunday mornings!!

So I'm not sure I've answered my questions about low church attendance (although I really already know most of the reasons many of us may have missed a few Sundays – vacations, reunions, kids' stuff), but maybe a better question is why am *I* not always intentionally practicing a true Sabbath more often (which might be any day of the week), and how can I convey and reiterate the idea of Sunday worship being a time of hygge?

I suppose it comes down to our values and priorities. Can I consider being in worship an important part of resting and experiencing hygge? And do I ever use 'I need to rest' as an excuse for skipping worship? I hope not. Because it's pretty clear why keeping a Sabbath should be done if we listen to what the prophet Isaiah had to say about it:

Isaiah 58: 13-14a says,

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD...”

And it may seem like it would have been easier in Isaiah’s day to keep the Sabbath holy with no outside activities to interfere, but just daily living was labor intensive for those people! So maybe we just need to focus on that day of rest and prioritize our times of rest and hygge; something I need to seriously work on.

The promise is the joy of the Lord!