

**Summer by the Lake: Enjoy!**  
**Genesis 1: 27-2:3**  
**Trinity United Methodist Church**  
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**Rev. Lore Blinn Gibson**

When Randy first moved back to Indiana with me, he pointed out that we Hoosiers use the word 'enjoy' a lot. We enjoy being together. We enjoy a good basketball game. We enjoy ice cream on a hot summer day. We find things 'enjoyable.' "Thanks, I really enjoyed it" is not an uncommon phrase at the end of a pleasurable evening. It seemed to Randy that we enjoy everything. Although I suspect that when you tell me you enjoyed my sermon, you don't mean the same thing as you do when you say you enjoyed watching Notre Dame play football or you enjoyed the donuts in Fellowship Hall!

Enjoy has always meant just what its two parts mean. To make joy in, to put joy in, to rejoice in, to gladden.

Maybe we're just vocabulary challenged. I suspect, though, that we enjoy less than we used to. No one sits down and says, "I think I won't enjoy today." Nobody sane plans to have a life that is miserable and dull. Jesus says, in John 10:10 that he came to give us life, abundant life, life to the full. But if my appointment book is any indication, a whole lot of us are not living that life.

Joy doesn't necessarily mean happiness. It doesn't mean we get everything we want all the time. It isn't self-indulgent at all. Joy can come in moments of pain, when you realize that God is so near that nothing can harm us ultimately. Joy can come in moments of stress, when we realize we are doing exactly what he created us to do. Our forefathers and mothers wanted us to have the freedom for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. However, spend your life pursuing happiness and you will never find it. Spend life pursuing God, and the by-product is joy... a deep, rich sense that God is with us.

How much are you enjoying your life, how much joy is in your life? Do you want to enjoy your life? I do! I really do. And often, I'm not. What's the problem?

So let's pursue God, and find that joy. We must go back to the beginning, to creation. If we look at the first creation story, which starts in Genesis 1:1 and ends in 2:4, we learn that God created human beings last. In 1:27, we learn that humans are the piece de resistance of creation. Of everything created, we alone are created in God's image. We are like God. We create too. We love. We ponder and think and imagine.

God looks at it all. The day and night, the sun, moon and stars, the dry land and deep oceans. The birds flying and waddling, the fish darting through the water, the snakes and armadillos and duck-billed platypi, the elephant and the whale, and the people, all the people, and he says, "It's very good. Tov ma'od. Extremely good, immensely good. As good as it gets."

Then God does a very strange thing. He stops. Genesis 2:2.

This is the beginning of joy, since we are created in God's image. Stop. The Jews, on whom our whole tradition rests, saw that stopping is part of creation. It's a law like the law of gravity, not like the speed limit is 55. It's just the way things are. A life in the image of God, a truly human life, requires this. Stop creating. Stop fixing. Stop fiddling. Stop meddling. Stop controlling.

When was the last time YOU stopped? When I was younger, I used to sit with some retired women and talk while they did oil painting, usually landscapes. Listening is a good way to learn, and I would watch and listen each week. One week, they had been working on a landscape with an old barn and mountains in the background. For several weeks, they'd painted the shapes and colors, starting with the sky and the base of the foreground. They'd painted the barn and added details to the weathered boards. Finally, they had spent a couple of hours that night adding grasses and highlights to the trees, wildflowers here and there. Peggy looked increasingly frustrated as she painted, getting more and more tense by the minute. Finally, she slapped her brush on the table and turned the canvas toward Bev and Dorothy. "Tell me what it needs. I just can't get it to look right. Tell me what to do." The other two women took one look at it and said, at the exact same time, "Stop." Bev said, "It's great. If you mess with it any more, you will ruin it."

They taught me that one of the hardest things for an artist is to know when their work is done. It's true of anything. I used to think it was just farmers, but I've come to learn it is everyone. There is always more to do, there is always something in need of repair, always one more task. The first secret to enjoying life is to stop. God teaches us that.

Randy Rhoades told Mark a couple of weeks ago, "I hope you have the courage to be bored on your sabbatical." If we want to enjoy our lives, we have to stop.

What does God, in whose image we are created, stop doing? He stops his work. Rest is not, in the original language, taking a nap or sitting on a chair doing nothing. It is ceasing from creation, from controlling every detail. Stop making things. Stop fixing things. Stop controlling every little detail.

This was so very important, that the Jews made more and more laws to go with it. By Exodus 20, it has become one of the 10 Commandments. In Deuteronomy 5: 12-15, we hear God instruct the people to keep the Sabbath because they were once slaves. We're slaves if we work 24/7. Slaves to our jobs. Slaves to a sport. Slaves to our desires, to our whims. Slaves to a consumer economy that defines us by what we buy.

Stop! Stop making things better. Stop making things at all. Like those great theologians the Beatles say, Let it be. The weeds will still be there tomorrow. There will be work to be done, regardless. One day. Just stop.

In Mark 2, Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field, enjoying the Sabbath. The grain is ripe, so they pick a few kernels of wheat and chew on them while they are walking. The Pharisees are incensed by this flagrant violation of the law. Jesus shakes his head at them. They've missed the point. Sabbath is a gift to our hearts, not a set of rules to be obeyed. People are always getting this wrong, settling for the outward form instead of the inward attitude. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath – and so are we, who are re-created in his image by our faith in him. The Sabbath is meant to bring joy.

We get it wrong too. People wonder, "Can I mow the yard on the Sabbath? Can I play golf? Can I go for a run? Do I have to find a non-Christian somewhere to turn on my light switch, like the Jews find Gentiles to push the elevator button?" It is a matter of the heart and soul.

The true spirit of the Sabbath is not just that God stopped, but that in verse 3 of Genesis 2 he goes on to bless. The Sabbath is a blessed day. A gift meant for enjoying, putting joy into us. To restore in us the sense that things are, at the heart of them, *tov ma'od*. especially good.

So if stopping is the first key to enjoying the abundant life. Blessing is the second. In Hebrew, 'bless' is used for thanks, for praise, for any activity that points us back to the Source, to God. Make it holy, different, set it apart for God.

One day a week, or an hour, or half a day, we trace everything back to the Creator and say thank you. Alice Walker says, in her book "The Color Purple": "I think it [ticks] God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

Once a week, deliberately, intentionally, give thanks for what is instead of trying to fix it or complaining about what isn't. Once a week, look for God signs in your life, in the world. Once a week, thank God for your spouse instead of trying to change him or wishing she was different. Once a week, try to compliment your children or your friends. Once a week, notice the color purple, and the million shades of green, and give thanks for your eyes and nose and breath. Once a week, stop worrying about what will happen and enjoy what is right in front of you.

A little girl went with her mom to the library for the first time. Standing in front of the racks of books, the little girl said, "Really? I can take them home?" The mom assured her that was the case. The little girl reverently touched the plastic spines, brushing her fingers down every shelf, "Mine, mine, mine, you're all mine!"

Do we really need to go to Wal-Mart every day? Can we not cease our cravings for just a moment?

One day a week, we don't have to own things to enjoy them. One day a week, we let what is, be. One day a week, we look for blessings and Presence, for the pearl of great price, buried in the field of the world.

Stop. Bless. These are the secrets to enjoying life. They are secrets for all life.

Jesus got frustrated with the Pharisees because they got mired in the same thing. Instead of enjoying the Sabbath, seeing it as a gift to their hearts, they made it a matter of outward laws. Paul, in Romans 14, won't even let it be relegated to a particular day. When it comes to days or times, whatever you do, do it with your heart. Stop. Bless. It's a heart thing, a soul thing.

When kids play on concrete sidewalks, there is this rhyme they say, "Step on a crack, break your mother's back." Most sidewalks, though, have built-in cracks. Spaces. Why are they there?

In Indiana, the ground under the sidewalk freezes and thaws, expands and contracts. If you don't build in some cracks, the cement will break and crack under the stress of all that movement. If you don't build in breaks, the concrete will break.

It is intentional, this enjoying. We have to do it on purpose. *Make* it holy. Without the intentionality, half the population would make every day Sabbath, and the other half would be workaholics.

Alice Walker also said, "Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week." This is a time that looks different than the other six days. Work as hard as you want, but schedule time to stop working too. Make your living, but also make your life. Schedule and plan time for God.

I don't know about you, but at church we have something Mark calls 'job creep.' The longer we work here, the more stuff that finds its way to our plates. Pretty soon, all kinds of stuff has crept into your daily schedule. We lose focus and effectiveness, because what we are doing is not what we are supposed to do.

It works that way with Sabbath, in a positive way. I think what we practice on that seventh day creeps into the rest of the week. If on your Sabbath, you notice the black-eyed Susans blooming, you thank God for them. Then on Tuesday, when you are rushing off to work, maybe for a moment you will notice them and turn to God in thanksgiving. You'll breathe deeply of the rest and refreshment every morning.

It creeps into the world, too. That's why keeping the Sabbath became so important for God's people. God insisted on it. They were here to bless the world. Hallowing, making the Sabbath, keeping it, sort of crept into other people. When God's people stopped trying to possess everything for one day a week, they were able to be more peaceful the rest of the week. When God's people rest, others get more rest too. When God's people enjoy, others enjoy.

When we keep Sabbath, we become more our true selves. The image of Christ, which in Colossians we're told is the perfect image of God, gets renewed and reworked in us. The whole world benefits. Our eternal life becomes a reality, here and now. Earth is a little more like heaven. We are little more like Jesus. And isn't that what it is really all about? Enjoy!