

Stop- Gen 2:1-3, Ex 20:8-11, Mark 2:23-28 (Sunday 23rd March 2014 – Rev. Lou)

We live in a society that cannot stop. It simply never sleeps, I mean you can now do your grocery shop in the middle of the night if you like, there's no limits on when you can do anything anymore. And the result of all of this is that we struggle to stop work, we struggle to stop shopping, we struggle to turn our phones off, we struggle to live without being constantly available to the world at any given time day or night. We work longer hours than we did 30yrs ago, it's been calculated that we spend on average probably 2hrs less a night sleeping than we have done previously and all this while managing the ever increasing constancy of pressure to perform.

You know what's really frightening about all this is that although as you know I quite like football it would seem to me that we are all soon going to be living our lives under the same stress and pressure as a football manager all in a game where results are key and woe betide you if the results don't go your way, because once that happens you find yourself out of a job and there's already a huge long line of people eager to take up what you've failed in.

And this increasing obsession with gaining the right results as fast as possible, just fuels this notion that in the results business that so much of life has become we just can't afford to stop, it's as simple as that. And of course then constant busyness and a nonstop work commitment is then seen as being a virtue, something to be looked for in a prospective employee, who's going to give the most hours dedicate the most time, who's going to work nonstop for us so we can get the results we need before our competition.

It is into this world of constant busyness that God speaks a word and that word is Shabbat, Sabbath... STOP! A day of rest. A time and a place to STOP, cease, end, rest. And this word is a powerful word and just so I can stick to the good old 3 point sermon I want to try and suggest 3 reasons for this word that God speaks into the world he created.

1. We STOP because its blessed.

Notice that we read in Genesis that God blessed the 7th day, he made it holy it was to be set apart for him. You see there is a blessing on resting and stopping God it would seem is a God who delights to stop. On these verses, Walter Brueggeman says 'this God is not a workaholic. Yahweh has no need to be more secure, sufficient or noticed. Its ordained in the fabric of creation that the world is not a place of endless productivity, ambition or anxiety. Yet this is exactly what the word we live in is like isn't it, one of endless productivity, unquenchable ambition and ever increasing anxiety all the things it was never ever created to be.

It would seem to me that we live in a world that has adopted the mentality of sport, that sport has become so big, so vast that it has become the approach that many take to everyday life.

From an early age our kids play sport and I remember thinking it daft when it got to the stage where every child got a sticker, every child got a medal I can hear myself saying well I mean it's not really teaching them much about the real world, because the real worlds not like that is it you don't get the prize for taking part and coming last, you get it for winning, for being better, faster, more productive than the others. And when I think back to that I begin to wonder how true but also how sad that statement is because you see its not long before you realise that with a sporting attitude

towards life we really then see life itself as a competition, one in which you've always got to do better one that you're in to win. And it can be seen in so many areas. within industry and trade, we compete with China for jobs, and goods, and contracts. Within schools we have the blessed offsted results granting you the constant pressure of having to do better than the last time, you have to compete with the schools in the area, it's a competition to for the best results. And of course when the results don't go right, when things are lost, productivity is down, targets are not met the competition starts to be lost and redundancy then appears and a whole other competitive sporting arena rears its ugly face. In so many areas of life we think with a sporting mentality and we never really realise it, but if we think like this I ask when are we actually going to stop and rest? When do we get to stop and rest?

I think that this morning I would want to suggest to you that you think about what world it is you are living in, I would want to suggest to you that you have the choice, that you can choose which world you are living in. It can be this competitive nonstop, no rest world or it can be the world as we read God created it to be. Which one do you live in?

And then hear these words from the writer to the Hebrews 'There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their own work, just as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest.'

We STOP because it is blessed to do so.

But also we see that

2. We STOP because it is just.

What do I mean by that, well when we listened to the reading from Exodus we realise that this idea of a Sabbath rest the idea of stopping is actually one of the 10 commandments and most interestingly it is the longest of the 10 commandments. I don't know whether you've ever spent time looking at the commandments themselves but it would seem to me that the first 3 are all to do with our behaviour towards God and numbers 5-9 deal with our behaviour towards other people and number 10 deals with our thinking. But number 4 the one all about the Sabbath it would seem to me bridges quite nicely the commandments that are purely to do with our behaviour towards God with those that are to do with our behaviour towards other people. The whole idea of stopping and resting is one that involves everyone around and about us and therefore consequently when we don't stop the knock on effects of that will affect all those around and about us.

When we work too hard, when we don't stop someone always pays the price. It may be our bodies that pay, overworking is proven to push people into more and more extreme ways of trying to find relaxation without stopping, habits are formed compulsions are followed, what starts as just a glass of wine or a shot of whiskey to unwind can easily over time become a bottle, the numbers of people getting hooked into online pornography as a means to escape from the nonstop routine of life is ever increasing. And of course stress eventually will produce physical symptoms. And of course it's easy to realise that this affects those around us they worry, they become concerned. What ends up happening is that we force others into work to accommodate our inability to be able to stop. We want this or that and we want it now, but what about the people who work for a pittance to make that product to provide the things we want and need. We stop because it is just.

And finally;

3. We STOP because its safe

Have you ever jumped a red light...be honest now?! I know I have and I've got away with it, I mean I haven't crashed or got a fine it seemed no problem at all. But you see red lights are there for a reason, namely because at that moment it is safer to stop, and its true you may get away with it for a bit or even for quite a while, but if you persist in jumping red lights, if you continue to fail to stop then it is inevitable that you will get hurt one way or another whether that be with points on your licence or actually physically being involved in a collision with another vehicle or a person.

Every Sabbath is a red light and it's a red light to keep you safe and to keep those around you safe, if you jump the light frequently disaster will eventually strike. God places this command in the bible for our safety for our well being

Now you may say well that's all well and good but things have moved ion since the bible was written and my job is very important and there weren't jobs like this in bible times, well all I can say is that God was creating the world and he stopped so go figure!

We stop because it is blessed because it is just and because it is safe. So this morning how are you living in the reality of the Sabbath. It would seem to me that Jesus wasn't keen on burdening people with rules and regulations but was clear that Sabbath was made for humankind made to grant to us rhythm in our days, weeks months and years, made to offer us balance between our doing and our being, given so that we face our fears and ask ourselves why it is we struggle to stop, why we overwork and what will happen if we stop. You know the traffic lights are a good picture to have green light when we work flat out, amber light when we have recreation time socialising, film meeting with folk and then red light simply when we stop. For every green there's always an amber and a red is that true for you?

It's given so that you and me can take hold of the fact that we are made in God's image and the God whose image we are made in stopped and rested, had no need to endlessly continue to gain an identity, or more sufficiency or security.

'There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their own work, just as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest.'

Amen