Summer Sabbath Rest

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” *Exodus 20:8*

The early chapters of the Bible establish for us a rhythm of life, a pattern of work and rest, that reflects the first Genesis creation story where, we are told, God ‘rests’ on the Sabbath. It was the pattern of life that Jesus grew up with. Sabbath rest is easily interpreted as our chance to put our feet up after a busy week. It is that – and that has its value – but ‘sabbath’ has always represented so much more. If we read on in Exodus, the first thing we discover is that the animals in human care were also expected to be rested on the Sabbath: no putting the donkey or the cattle to work whilst humankind took a breather.

The Jewish people also kept a sabbath year on a seven year cycle (Leviticus 25:3-7). This was a time when the land was to ‘keep a sabbath of sacred rest’: no sowing or pruning; a time for the land to rest and recover, with people and animals only eating what the land provides without human intervention.

These sabbath cycles contain a wisdom that we need to regain. Many people regard human beings as the ‘crown’ of creation’, but for ancient Jewish thinkers this honour was reserved for the Sabbath. This was the day on which we were to regularly sit back and stop ‘using’ or ‘taking’ from creation and simply wonder at it and remember the Creator.

The weekly Sabbath benefitted humans and the animals within their care. The sabbath year was the one that recognised humankind could not flourish unless they respected the earth: it was the year that prevented soil depletion and soil erosion; it benefitted not just humans but also wild animals, and helped preserve the (limited) biodiversity of the fragile land that the Hebrew people farmed.

If we are fortunate, we might be enjoying a holiday this summer, perhaps a much needed ‘sabbath’ rest after the challenges of the past year and more. How can we take that sabbath rest, in a way that is ‘holy’, that honours the Creator, and that allows creation to flourish rather than ‘taking’ more from it? Here are just a few suggestions that might help us keep our holidays as ‘creation friendly’ as we can:

* **Cut out the plastic wherever we can:** avoid buying travel size versions of toiletries; pack our picnic sandwiches in brown paper bags; remember to take our refillable water bottles with us
* **Choose greener transportation if we can.**Most of us won’t be flying anywhere this year which is good news for the planet. Can we do some of our journeys by train rather than car? If we *are* flying, what about carbon offsetting the journey?
* **Resist buying new clothes just for a holiday:** the fast fashion industry does a lot of damage to the environment**.**
* **Support local businesses.**  Buy food, wine, and gifts from local, independent sellers. Locally produced items have a lower carbon footprint.
* **Leave no trace.**If we get to spend time in nature, we can be as hands-off as possible: let animals do their thing, don’t pick flowers or plants, and don’t leave any rubbish behind.
* And if we are planning on swimming in the sea (which I love!) and want to be kind to the oceans too **make sure the sun cream is ‘reef-safe’.** (Most sun screens contain chemicals that harm ocean wildlife, especially our precious coral reefs.)

I hope we all find some truly restoring and deeply holy Sabbath rest at some point this summer, caring for ourselves as we care for God’s creation.

*Rev Dr Jan Goodair*

Joint Area Environment Champion – Leeds