We have had a groovy month together! Summer of Love! Groovy! We’ve had a far-out awesome August! Letting love FLOW and GROW in our Summer of Love sermon series!

We have loved our friends, our communities, and loved our families…loved, loved, loved.

Thanks to those of you wearing your tie die shirts or sporting some fun colors. Wish you could see things from this perspective…COOL! Colorful way to bring our sermon series to a close! Hope we get some pictures.

Today we wrap up our last theme in our Summer of Love, to love God.

Oh my word…there are so many ways we can and do love God. We love God when we come to church, make it a priority. A shout out to those who watch online because they have work conflicts, health or mobility issues.

We also love God as we worship in song and trust God with our finances and our giving. We love God as we fellowship with one another, enjoying one another, praying for one another and serving one another.

I have expressed my love to God and had way too much fun doing it when I participated in Reading in the Park. So fun!

And thrilled to get to know the kids and parents better in VBS this last week…(practicing names…Jace and Ali and their mom Wendy and Ali’s friend Annabell, Bill and Oliver and their mom Christy, Hannah and her mom Beth, Rita’s two granddaughters..Maya and Nova.

There were hot dogs, cookies, glitter, sign language, and glitter, goofing off, and learning more about God. And did I mention glitter, lots of glitter?

Enjoyed getting to know the adult volunteers too! (Point out…Gail, Abby, Esther and Norm. Jill and Gerry co-leaders for VBS. Of course, Andrea. Thanks to everyone!

But there is yet another way we can show God our love. We love God when we honor and keep the Sabbath. To sabbath is to regularly set aside time to rest from our work and rest in God’s love.

Okay…sabbath. Sabbath is a big churchy religious word. What does it mean? I have to admit, I haven’t understood much about sabbath until the last four or five years. I didn’t grow up in a Christian home and didn’t start going to church until I was 17. Once in church, we didn’t talk about sabbath.

My first-time hearing about sabbath came when I was in grade school, reading the Little House on the Prairie books.

Pa Ingles was sharing a story with his daughters about one experience he had as a kid observing the Sabbath. One Sunday after church and the noon meal, his siblings decided to go sledding. They spent hours in the cold and had a lot of fun together. But when they got home, they got yelled at for playing on the sabbath.

So, my first introduction to keeping the sabbath…it was a strict religious observance that was about being quiet, stuck inside, and being BORED.

Just so you know, God has had to help me unravel a lot of wrong thinking about the Sabbath. God meant it to be a BLESSING but humans made it into a BURDEN.

As a society, as a church in general, I think we also struggle to understand what the sabbath is supposed to be. Do we keep it or not? No wonder we often fail to see it as a blessing.

Miss out on how it was meant to delight our souls, give refreshment, bring healing and renewed energy, draw us close to God, while nurturing a growing sense of love and awe of God and a deeper appreciation for life.

I can’t think of a better time for us to understand how the sabbath benefits us than now. We are being overwhelmed by busyness, anxiety, feeling fractured and pulled in a bunch of different directions.

We need more, **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** Imagine 52 days of resting in God, allowing God access to us, to heal and renew us!

Maybe it would be helpful to share three brief truths about the Sabbath.

In EarlyWord we learned “sabbath” was first mentioned in Genesis 2, where God rested from his labors after creating EVERYTHING! **By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.**

We catch a vision here for this day as woven into the very fabric of creation, a constant holy thread from the beginning, reflecting God’s value for work AND value of giving us a day of rest.

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word “shabbat” meaning “rest”. In the Jewish faith, it is observed sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

It is the fourth commandment, **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10but 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. 11For 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.”**

The sabbath was meant as a gift to humanity. A gift to prevent us from wearing out our bodies, from wearing out our workers, travelers, animals and even wearing out the earth. Wow!

Well, with just that little bit of context, we can see this struggle to enjoy the sabbath has been going since the very beginning. And the Pharisees, from our text today, seemed to have lost sight of the original vision for the sabbath, still struggling to understand it.

By the time Jesus began teaching, the understanding of Sabbath rest had become a very stringent, legalized practice. And then on top of that.

The Pharisees created hundreds of traditions around the Sabbath that became as binding as scripture but were not scripture. These rules included…not making a meal, not kindling a fire, NOT putting out a fire…which seems problematic, and not walking over 2/3rds of a mile from your home.

More strangeness…you could carry two acorns but not three. Write one letter of the alphabet but NOT two letters. No weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying and untying sandals. But if you could untie your sandals with one hand, that wasn’t breaking the Sabbath. Huh?

Related to our text, other tasks that were unlawful…plowing, sowing, harvesting, threshing, and winnowing. So, when the disciples grabbed some wheat kernels as they walked through the field…that was harvesting? When they rubbed the kernels of grain between their palms, it was threshing! And when they blew the chaff away to eat what was left…they were winnowing!

So, the Pharisees raised the alarm, **“Look! Why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”**

With a such a legalistic and restrictive understanding of the sabbath, fixated on following a ton of weird rules, it shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus often broke these man-made sabbath rules.

And in John chapter 9 verse 16, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn the Pharisees said Jesus was not a man from God because he did not keep the sabbath. Well, their version of the sabbath.

Jesus seeking to deliver them from such oppressiveness, so many weird traditions, responded by saying, **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** In other words, the Sabbath is not meant to control you, the sabbath is meant to serve and benefit you.

Which begs the question, should Christians keep the Sabbath today?  **It was established as a sign of the Mosaic covenant. But Christians are under the New Covenant, the final covenant established by Christ.**

**We are free in Christ from observing the law. It’s why we do not have to observe animal sacrifice, food rules, or any special holy days listed in the Old Testament including keeping the sabbath.**

**And it is a commandment.**

**However, Christians are still meant to honor God as holy and to follow Christ. The Sabbath certainly helps us do that. We can utilize the sabbath to help us continue to walk with God and honor Jesus as Lord.**

**Where we experience the sabbath as a source of renewal, helping to enliven a Christian mindset and passion all the other days of the week; from Sunday to Sunday.**

G. Campbell Morgan says, **“Until Christ had come, man worked TOWARD his Sabbath.  Since Christ, he works FROM his Sabbath.  In the old economy… the Sabbath depended upon the work; in the new, the work grows out of the Sabbath.”** Our life and love and service can flow out of the deep well of time invested in sabbath.

Another strong motivation to consider leaning into the Sabbath, Jesus observed the sabbath. We can look to Jesus to show us what honoring the sabbath might look like for us.

In his book, *Wrestling with Rest,* Nathan Stucky notes that Jesus only spends one Sabbath day alone. The rest of his sabbaths he spends in various types of community.

Jesus treated it as a holy day, time to create space to honor God, a day to worship. At other times, Jesus recharged by spending time in prayerful solitude.

Jesus did not see Sabbath as a restrictive, joyless practice; instead, it was a time to share with others, a time to extend love and grace. Jesus invited his disciples into Sabbath for quietness, being apart, prayer, and fellowship.

We can see that there are different ways to Sabbath at different times, and when we have different needs.

Each of us has the ability to take time apart with God. And when it is practiced, we might find we resonate with this anonymous quote, **“… the Sabbath is the day in which I hand my life back to God to be reminded that my life is not my own. And that acknowledgment that I belong to a generous blessing God changes how I live the other six days of my life.”**

My sabbath is on Monday because I am here…working. And I have noticed that I have to do some things to make sure my sabbath happens. Chores on Friday, cook on Saturday, clean on Sunday so that Monday is more free to sabbath. The sabbath reminds me that it is God who abundantly sustains my life.

Dear friends, consider the gift God has given, consider the blessing the sabbath is meant to provide us.

Do you need rest, renewal, refreshment, deep peace, to reclaim your purpose for living, healing and wholeness, a new infusion of joy and inspiration, to see the future of the church surrounded and shimmering in hope and vitality, for our hearts to be overflowing in love to others?

When you come into God’s Presence thru the sabbath you receive all those things and MORE simply being WITH God.

Just consider how much the sabbath can save our Sunday from just being another Saturday with an hour of worship thrown in. Consider how leaning into the sabbath could transform our upcoming year, infusing it to overflowing with more hope, energy, and love! Amen!

**As we transition into a time of reflection**…consider what next step you might take to enjoy the sabbath more fully!