

I

It's funny how things that were once a matter of course for one generation can seem so alien and foreign to the next. A few summers ago, I was at the water park with my kids when my cell phone got wet. I needed to call Amy and tell her we would be a little late, so I began searching for a pay phone. I stopped a security guard, who looked was probably about 19 years old, and I asked him where I could find a pay phone. And he said to me, in all seriousness, "What's a pay phone?"

When I was growing up playing high school football, we'd practice until well after dark on Mondays and Tuesdays. But on Wednesdays, practice ended at 5:30 sharp because Wednesday was a church night. Friday was gameday, and Saturday mornings, we were back up at the school watching the game film and practicing again. But even in the heat of the state playoffs, there were no games or practices ever scheduled on Sundays.

II

But in the span of a generation, even in Texas, the so-called buckle of the Bible belt, there is no longer a tacit cultural accommodation for the Sabbath. Most of the so-called Blue Laws that dictated that businesses must close one day out of the week that were once on the books have either been repealed or are simply no longer enforced. In my parents and grandparents' generation, it was unheard of for businesses to be open on

Sundays. Now, it's the other way around. And by the way, why is it that I only really crave Chick-Fil-A on Sundays?

III

As most of you know, this summer, we're working our way through a series of sermons entitled "Words to Live By: The Ten Commandments." And today, we come to the fourth commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

As we've been making our way through the Ten Commandments, we've been learning a memory device using our ten fingers. As every good teacher knows, memorization is a building block of learning. You can't analyze or apply what you haven't internalized, so as a church, we're working on memorizing the Ten Commandments.

So let's review, shall we? Put your index finger in the air, and note that it looks like the letter "I" as well as the number one. The first commandment is "*I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.*"

Now take your pinky finger and make the sign for 'Hook 'Em Horns. The horns remind us that the Israelites angered God by worshiping a burnt orange Longhorn, I mean, a golden calf, so take those two fingers and point them down. The second commandment is, "*You shall not make for yourself any idols.*"

Now put three fingers up, and notice that it looks like the letter 'W,' which begins the word, "wrongful." Now touch that "wrongful w" to your lips. The third commandment is "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God."

And now we come to the fourth commandment. Take your hand, and give your thumb a little rest. See how by resting one of your fingers you've made the number 4? Now tap your four fingers to your temple like you're trying to remember something. The fourth commandment is "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

Keep it holy.

Holy is a word that gets used quite a bit in church circles. It shows up so often in Scripture and prayers and hymns that I think sometimes we gloss over it. One definition of the word holy is "different."

Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day should be holy, or, put another way, the seventh day should be different.

Why would God require that one day out of every seven be set aside as different? What's at stake here?

Remember, the Ten Commandments did not just drop out of the sky one day. The Ten Commandments are an integral part of the larger story of the liberation and redemption of God's chosen people, collectively called the Israelites, to whom we trace our heritage of faith

through Jesus of Nazareth, whom we call the Christ.

When the story of Exodus opens, our ancestors are living not in the Land of Promise, but rather, because of economic upheaval and food insecurity, they have emigrated to the land of Egypt, where at first they were welcomed as neighbors and friends.

But a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt, a tyrant who practiced a politics of fear, racism, and scapegoating, and he incited the Egyptians to enslave the Israelites and make their lives bitter.

In Pharaoh's Egypt, there were no holy, different days. In Pharaoh's Egypt, profits always took precedence over people. In Pharaoh's economy, there was simply no time for rest, renewal, or delight.

Which makes the rationale that God gives for the Sabbath day all the more biting. It took the Pharaohs hundreds of years working around the clock with slave labor to build the great monuments in Egypt. But God says, in Ryan's Revised Translation of the Hebrew, "Pish posh. I made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them in just six days. But on the seventh day I rested. On the seventh day, things were different. Therefore, I have set the seventh day aside and blessed it."

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that I have delivered you out of there to become my

chosen, covenant people. Remember that the sabbath is a gift - not just for you, but for everyone and everything in your sphere of influence.

So remember who and whose you are. Remember that you are mine, and I have called you to be my holy people. Remember that I am *your* God, and I have called you to be *different*.

IV

My brother, you and I know that the culture in which we live and move and have our being has little use for the concept of Sabbath. My sister, you and I know that whatever tacit cultural support there may once have been for Sabbath is gone. You and I both know that the idea of Sabbath, setting aside one day of every week for rest, worship, and delight sounds like something out of a Normal Rockwell painting. Meanwhile, here in real life, we've got bills to pay and kids to feed and wash to do, and there just doesn't seem to be anywhere to fit it in.

And perhaps that's why God made Sabbath a commandment. Not just a suggestion. Not just a good idea that in a perfect world, we would follow, like exercising and eating right. But God made it a commandment - a part of the framework for building a just and moral society.

Because otherwise, give our human tendency want be masters of our own universes, Sabbath would be too easy to ignore. So God requires Sabbath

not just for you, but for everyone who lives in your sphere of influence.

But not only is Sabbath a gift, and not only is it a commandment, but it's also an act of countercultural resistance. Making one day out of every seven holy, making one day out of every seven different - is a rejection of the values of Pharaoh.

It's a way of saying, "Yeah, I know there are bills to pay and kids to raise, but I'm not going to worship the idol of busyness. I'm not going to be driven by the Almighty dollar. I'm not going to let my calendar rule my life, but rather I'm going to steward my time in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God. God worked God's tail off for six days, but on the seventh day, God rested, and lo and behold, the world did not fall to pieces. Maybe I can rest one day out of every seven, and know that my world won't fall apart, either.

But make no mistake. Keeping the Sabbath holy, making one day out of every seven different, will make you weird.

But the good news is you're already weird. The very fact that you're sitting here this morning makes you a little weird compared to your friends. You had so many places you could have been at this very moment. You could have been at breakfast, or at the golf course, or at the lake, or at the church of the mattress, and no one would have thought any less of you.

But you've already decided to be a little different. You've already decided that there's more to this life than what you can see, hold, and buy. You've already decided that the values of Pharaoh that drive so much of what goes on in this world leave something to be desired. You've already decided that there's something about this Jesus guy, who keeps on insisting that the Sabbath was made for humankind, rather than the other way around.

V

Don't forget, friends, we're here to do be weird together. So what would it look like if we were to get a little more serious about keeping Sabbath? What would it look like if we were to get a little more intentional about making one day out of every seven different? What might begin to happen to us, to our children, to our colleagues?

It would probably look and feel a little weird, because Sabbath is an act of resistance against the values of Pharaoh. But that's OK. Because another definition of the word weird – is holy, and that's who we are – God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy, different, weird people, who have been liberated, who have been redeemed, who have been called to live by the values of the kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.