

SERMON SAVOURING THE SABBATH - ENGAGING THE SENSES

There's an ancient piece of Jewish spiritual wisdom, where the Chief Rabbi asked his students a very big question, which is this.

When you come face to face with your Creator God in the next life, what will be the first question that God will ask of you? Have a moment to ponder this yourself.

The rabbi told his students that the first question God will ask is this...



Did you enjoy my Creation? Did you delight in all the abundant good gifts that I created for you to savour? Did you dwell with Me and gaze on my beauty?

The point of the wisdom of course, is that life is a precious gift to be savoured.

We know that God delights in his own magnificent handiworks because Genesis 1:31 makes this very clear...



"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

And the most basic reason that God delights in his own creation, is because it reflects and reveals all of God's creative wisdom and glory. **I like the way John Piper puts it...**

"God is overflowing with satisfaction as he looks out over the endless panorama of his own perfections"

That God then rested on the 7th day, actually tells us, is a deeply profound truth intrinsic to all Creation.

If God took time to pause, enjoy and savour the fruits of his majestic labours ... **then we**, (as people created in the image of God), must do the same.

We must **enjoy** both the fruits of God's labours and our own. Sabbath is intrinsic.

BUT... there is a Spiritual art and a wisdom, of HOW we do this.

And we're all aware of what this truth is, it's just that it's so darn elusive to put into practise. Now there are some great quotes that capture this wisdom and truth, but this is probably my favourite.



"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery.

Today is a gift from God, which is why we call it the present".

If we are to enjoy and savour ALL of God's creation, we need to live fully engaged in the present moment.

We all know that when we dwell too much in the past or the future, it steals our joy in the present. And you won't get a more beautiful verse of scripture that captures this wisdom than these words from my Psalm 27:4



One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may **dwell** in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to **gaze** on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

Temple, as in the whole of the created order.

Brother Roger wrote the perennial book of wisdom on this called ***Practising the Presence of God***. In every single aspect of his life, no matter how mundane and ordinary, Brother Roger practised '**gazing on the beauty of the LORD**'. Being constantly alert to the gifts and presence of God... in the **present** moment.

One of the most exciting things about the advances in the fields of Neuroscience and Neuropsychology, is that all scientific data, simply backs up what ancient spiritual wisdom has proclaimed and practised down the centuries.

**Learning to live fully engaged in the 'Now'
is good for emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being.**

And **in a world of clamour, distraction and overwhelm**, there's a real hunger and thirst from people to come to terms with this deeply profound truth. It's why books, podcasts, and You Tube videos that deal with savouring the present moment are so popular. It's why the discipline of mindfulness has so captured people's imaginations.

**The principle of Sabbath is a reminder to us ...
that if we want to be people who are fully human, fully alive...
Then we need to be fully engaged in the present moment.
Dwelling, gazing and savouring.**

AND ALL OF THIS, BRINGS ME TO THE MAIN POINT THAT I WANT TO MAKE TODAY, WHICH IS THIS.



**If we want fully engage in the present moment ...
then we also need to fully engage with our God given senses.
SIGHT, SMELL, HEARING, TASTE AND TOUCH**

It's generally accepted, that we do have more than five, but it's these I want to talk about today, **And the reason I want to explore this today is simple.**

I think it would be fair to suggest, that our Christian faith hasn't always been fully at ease with this spiritual discipline. Pardon the pun... but there's been a 'sniffy suspicion' of our **sensory humanity**.

Anything associated with body and "flesh" has all been seen, as a bit '*carnal desire*' or '*Catholic*' and needed to be denied or suppressed or even purged.

As someone who's a bit of a late comer to the Christian faith, it still staggers me to hear people in this church, tell me about how they were taught that dancing to secular music was of the devil.

I've had Christians say to me (almost a bit apologetically), that they mainly experience God's presence through Gods creation. As if it's somehow, a tad second rate, to delight in God's presence this way. But WHY would this be? **God's first revelation of who God IS, comes through the majestic splendour of ALL that God created.**

Over the past couple of hundred years, we in the West in particular, have tended to become very head based. As someone put it, "***the Word became flesh and we turned it back into words again***" God has become a theology, theory, doctrine and explanation, which are all very important and valid... but they shouldn't come at the **expense** of our God given sensory humanity.

Because when you stop to think about it... How else can we experience God, if not through our senses? All that we ever experience, perceive and understand about EVERYTHING IN LIFE, has come to us through our senses. So, to **not** fully engage with our senses, is to diminish our capacity to fully experience and enjoy life and therefore God.

It's interesting that the writers of scripture, often describe the majesty and mystery of God, using the metaphor of our senses.

• Psalm 34:8
Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
• Matthew 13:16
But blessed are your eyes, for they see,
and your ears, for they hear
• 2 Corinthians 2:14
But thanks be to God, who in Christ spreads the
fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
• Matthew 5:6
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

- Psalm 34:8 **Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!**
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- Matthew 5:6 **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

And of course, at the very centre of our faith and belief is WHAT?

That in Christ ... the Word became *flesh* to reveal God. Listen to these words of St John, again.

That which was from the beginning
(Christ the Word)
we have *heard* - we have looked upon
and *seen* with our eyes.
We've *touched* with our hands,
this word of life,
because it was made manifest.
Because of *this*, we can have fellowship,
relationship with the Father
and with his Son Jesus Christ.
1 JOHN 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning (Christ the Word) we have **heard** - we have looked upon and **seen** with our eyes. We've **touched** with our hands, this word of life, because it was made manifest. Because of this, we can have fellowship, relationship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Notice the emphasis on the sensory nature of their experience of Christ. As well as the divine nature of Christ, **their faith** (the first believers) and **our faith** is enriched by the fact that Jesus was fully flesh and blood human.

And we know that Jesus engaged in his senses fully.

Jesus would disappear into the mountains to find a quiet place to engage his sense of hearing and do some deep listening. Anyone who's ever done a silent retreat, knows that there's nothing like silence, to enhance and sharpen **ALL** our senses.

Equally, Jesus **enjoyed**, eating, drinking (tasting) and being in company. He engaged his sense of **touch** to heal.

He cured the blind man by mixing his saliva with mud and wiping it on the blind man's eyes. Skin on skin. He touched the woman bent double, to heal her and he even did it on the Sabbath.

And we know that all this sensory stuff from Jesus freaked out the Pharisees.

They accused Him of being a wine bibber and drunkard. They accused Him of being heretic for daring to heal on the Sabbath and for even eating on the Sabbath with His disciples.

And what was Jesus' response to all this?

Well Jesus accused them, of missing the Sabbath point.

He basically said to them... "You've tied up the beauty of the Sabbath principle, in a knot of legalistic 'do's and don'ts' and you're burdening the people".

The Sabbath is supposed to be life-giving celebration, not a life-denying regulation.

And there's a big truth for us, in all this.

Because the real sadness of the Pharisees mindset, is that they became so concerned with their own 'rightness' or 'moral uprightness' - it blinded them to seeing the beauty of God's presence in their midst. And they didn't really know how to **enjoy** God either. This mindset still exists in Christianity, and I've bumped into a few times since I became a Christian.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

I want to bring things together, by offering 3 practical ways we can live more fully in the present moment, and deepen our experience of God?



DELIGHT IN AN ATTITUDE OF CURIOSITY, AWE and WONDER

It's those words of wisdom from Psalm 27:4 again. **Dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of your life, gaze on the beauty of the LORD and seek him in his temple.** All of Creation is God's sacred temple, so it's really important, to see **all of life** through a lens of curiosity, awe and wonder, **whatever our age.**

To lose this spirit of curiosity, is to lose the essence of life.

So open the eyes of our hearts to seek and see and gaze on the beauty of God.

DELIGHT IN THE WORLD OF THE ARTS



We know that the Arts – music, painting, writing, drama and dancing, are ways that people enjoy the gift of life. We are nourished and enriched by these beautiful sacred expressions. Medical science shows us that these sensory gifts from God, are all instruments of healing.

People who have suffered deep traumas in life are helped back to healing through the arts.

Anyone who's ever sang in a choir knows that it promotes well-being and enjoyment and we get taken to a place of transcendence by these expressions.

BUT why would be ever surprised by this?

Who created the capacity in us to dance, paint, write and make music and sing?

And who gave us these senses to enjoy, be enriched and nourished by these sacred expressions?

FINALLY- DELIGHT IN YOUR GOD GIVEN SENSES

To 'stop and smell the roses' is so much more than a piece of wisdom on the sense of smell. It's a metaphor about how we truly take in and savour the delights of every aspect of God's good creation. Including how we read scripture.

Instead of just glimpsing... take time to gaze.

Don't just look ... take time to linger.

When you swallow ... don't forget to savour and taste.

Remember to truly smell ALL the fragrances of life

Take time to touch and take the sensation in.

As St Irenaeus said ... “the glory of God is a human being fully human fully alive”.
Read and meditate on Scripture using ALL your senses.

**I’LL FINISH WITH A PERSONAL STORY OF MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF
ENGAGING WITH MY SENSES.**

On Boxing Day, I really felt the need to recover from the intense Christmas exertions and was definitely in need, of some Sabbath restoration.

So, I made myself a coffee and lay back in the recliner. And I thought to myself I’m really going to dwell in this moment.

I love the aroma of coffee, so I took time to really *smell* the coffee and *taste* the coffee.

I *felt* the warm sun and the gentle breeze on my face.

I *listened* to the soft rustle of the trees.

And as I listened, I began to notice the different birds singing their different distinctive songs. And it brought to mind words I haven’t heard in a long time.

They were warbling and chirruping,

And I thought, how blessed am I to be treated to this free gift of their birdsong symphony? And it gave me a sense of uplift and restoration.

After a while, I looked down and saw Tilly our small dog, looking up at me with the eyes that said “can I jump up into your lap for a bit of stroking.

All pet owners will tell you that to *stroke* your pet induces a sense of well-being and calm. And this isn’t just a figment of our imagination, medical science shows very clearly that *touch* is good for our well-being and soul.

It’s why cuddles and hugs are essential for children to thrive.

As I sat there, I has a real sense of oneness with the moment.

A quiet sense of gratitude for the gift of life. It was only a ‘small moment’ but life is mostly made up of the ‘small moments’. And these can often pass us by. It’s where I began to get the idea for this sermon.

**It was a timely reminder for me...
that if we want to truly engage and enjoy ALL of God’s creation ...
then we have to fully engage with the present moment ...
and we can only do this, when we fully engage with the gift of our God given
senses, in that moment and in that experience.**