

Friends

I'm writing this a little early as I will be on leave on the Tuesday I would usually write it. Leave is a strange thing as a minister, and of course in any self-employed role, because we have to front-load the previous week in order to ensure that nothing is missed, and then we have to play catch-up for at least a few days on our return. Nevertheless, time off is so important, that God himself not only took a day off, but actually created rest.

At the time when the Children of Israel declared that their God had decreed a weekly day off, or sabbath, they were the only people in the known world who thought that this should be so. And remember that "holidays" a word that is a bowdlerisation of two words "Holy Days" were also an invention of God and thus the ancient Israelites with their commemoration of Passover (Pesach), the feast of Weeks (Pentecost/Shavuot) and the Feast of Booths, or of Ingathering (Sukkot). These festivals also coincided with the three Harvest Festivals they were commanded to celebrate: Early Spring (barley harvest); Late Spring/Summer (wheat harvest/first fruits) and Autumn (end of the year, fruit/olive harvest).

Later, when Jesus had been raised, the first Christians were also Jews and so they celebrated Saturday as Sabbath, as they always had, and Sunday as the day Jesus rose. The weekend was born. Similarly, Passover, as we know, coincided with Easter, and Pentecost with Shavuot, leaving us with the final Harvest Festival, the one the Jewish people still mark by sleeping in tents to remind themselves of 40 years in the desert, which we celebrate as our Harvest Festival, the festival of ingathering. I don't know if you have ever thought of this, but this is also the only festival that is entirely in praise of God the Creator.

Since it seems highly unlikely that God *needs* to rest, and since the early Jewish understanding was that God only rested on the first Sabbath, and the rest of time he continuously works to hold the universe together, we are left with the understanding that God created rest and wants us to have it. Certainly, I am very much looking forward to mine, although by the time you read this, I will have returned.

God bless, Vicci