

Friends

I write this just before going on leave for a week, and by the time you read it, I will have returned. I am not convinced by the latest research that says that after you have had a week's leave from work, there is no more benefit to be had by further time off. I feel as if I need to spend a week sleeping before I can even start on leave, but I am sure that by the time I return, I shall be raring to go again!

The Jewish people were unique among the tribes of the Ancient Near East in insisting that there should be one day off in seven, and they believed that God himself had only rested on that very first Sabbath Day. God's work is constant in holding the universe, but on that seventh day of creation, God created rest.

We are so very good at using the other things that God created, sometimes in ways that can be seen as reckless, abusive or damaging. For example, our need for fast cars and instant gratification has driven much of the climate change we see today. Yet we don't over-use the idea of Sabbath - indeed often we don't use it enough.

In his book "Sabbath as Resistance" the theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests that in a world where we are constantly enjoined to study, work and get on in life, insisting on times of rest is an act of resistance in and of itself. It demands that people take time to reflect and to relax, and in slowing us down, it allows time for us to hear God speak - to say nothing of reducing stress levels and high blood pressure!

Keeping Sabbath, Brueggemann argues, is not about keeping rules, but about becoming a healthy person and restoring a healthy society. In a 24/7 culture of consumption where living seems to be something we do in order to achieve, accomplish, perform and possess, keeping the Sabbath allows us to break the cycle of wanting more of everything, and instead encourages us to focus on what is truly important: God, other people, all of life. The simple act of keeping the Sabbath can move us to a simpler but also more complete life.

Perhaps, as I take my Sabbath through leave, I will find this to be true, although there always seems to be something to do.

However, my hope is that in this time of Lent, reflection and fasting, we may all find something of the wholeness that God wills for us.

God bless, Vicci