

The Year of Jubilee
Deut 25
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Deut 25:1-5, 7-10,

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. 3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. 4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. 5 Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.

“Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. 9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.

23 “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. 24 Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

Type of debt	Total owed by an average U.S. household with this debt	Total owed in the U.S.
Any type of debt*	\$135,065	\$13.67 trillion
Credit cards (revolving)**	\$6,741	\$423.8 billion

Type of debt	Total owed by an average U.S. household with this debt	Total owed in the U.S.
Mortgages	\$185,591	\$9.24 trillion
Auto loans	\$27,630	\$1.28 trillion
Student loans	\$47,634	\$1.49 trillion

Earlier this week Amy and I did our routine Budget assessment for our household as she works on her contract renewal. We sit down and check all of our debt balances, all of our re-occurring bills and regular expenses and see where we can adjust some things. In our household we have found it helpful to do regularly for several reasons. One of the biggest reasons is because we have a large debt we are trying to pay down. We also have a lot of responsibility of upcoming expenses with two kids now in college. We are also still hoping to take a honeymoon trip to Australia, sooner rather than later. So we have some important goals.

Household debt and unexpected expenses are big burdens on the average family in the USA. Look at these staggering figures from 2018. We hear in the news regularly discussion on how to save money, reduce student loan debt, credit card debt, keep interest rates low, even the struggles of medical debt for our aging population. So many of us are living paycheck to paycheck, or on a fixed income. Even if we feel to be doing fine right now, many of us know that one unexpected hardship like getting laid off, having a serious medical condition

incapacitate us or accident could spin us into financial ruin. It is something that keeps many of us awake at night.

That awareness of how fragile life is economically and financially is one of the reasons our Christian faith calls on us to care for the poor, to help those who are experiencing hardship and why it was so important that Jesus' ministry included healing and feeding people. **In today's gospel story Jesus is challenged for healing once again on the Sabbath and he rebukes his critics** by questioning their moral values and priorities when it came to be honoring the Sabbath. He reminded the audience that the purpose of the sabbath is healing, restoration and most of all mercy for those who suffer. He raises up another aspect of sabbath that is not as quickly identified, but Sabbath is a time to release one another of hardship. To show mercy and to be charitable toward one another.

In the older testament verses we read today, **we hear of two other types of sabbath that are not as well known, and some scholars argue** were rarely practiced. The first was the forgiveness of debt every seven years. We would love that today wouldn't we. Could you imagine that your credit card debt would be forgiven every seven years? The second form was the requirement to give the land a sabbath year of rest. Farmers were expected to not plant the land every year, but to allow it to go fallow once every seven years as a rest. Any food that grew naturally on that ground during its sabbath was intended as free food for the poor to take and eat.

We see here that God understood the hardship of inequity in society. God tried to build into the new Israelite society a way to rebalance the economic disparities that hardships create. It was famine and hardship that first sent Jacob's family to Egypt and brought about the enslavement of their people. They started out as refugees and ended up as slaves. So it is not enough that they learn to have a day of rest to break the chain of slavery as we learned about two weeks ago. There needed to be safeguards in place to prevent the wealthy from taking

advantage of those who needed to borrow money to become enslaved or exploited into a lifetime of debt.

The fourth type of sabbath that we read about in Leviticus 25 is called the Year of Jubilee.

This was a generational sabbath of redemption of the land every fifty years. All land was also redistributed back to the original clans. Again, it was a redistribution of wealth because if you owned the land, you could gain wealth through the land.

We know that is true in our own history in the US. The right to vote was originally tied to only those who were landowners. When people came to the states to settle the expanding European settlers were offered land rights where they settled. When the emancipation of the slaves under President Lincoln there was special provision given to slaves **after the war to receive 40 acres and a mule as reparation for all the years of slavery to help them become established** as free persons. This was reversed under Andrew Jackson and many white property owners sought to exploit this provision when an extended recession hit giving rise to the sharecropper era in our history. A new form of slavery and oppression upon the African American people. Because freemen were not seen as citizens it was impossible for them, in many states, to become land owners.

It wasn't until the 1868 and the establishment of the 14th amendment allowing citizenship to African Americans did they really gain the right to own land. But once again ongoing discrimination and systemic racism worked to inhibit the purchase of land by African Americans.

According to Leviticus, God saw the ways that land ownership could exploit and enslave whole generations of people, so this Sabbath rule every 50 years was intended to break the cycle of generational indentureship or slavery of the promised land.

Over the past three weeks we have looked at the concept of sabbath in three very different intentions or origins. Creation, Deliverance and now Redemption. These three concepts are also embodied in Christ who even calls himself the Lord of the Sabbath.

In John 1 Jesus is identified as the creating for at creation, the Word of God speaking the worlds into being. Once creation is completed God rested.

When Jesus begins his ministry, he reads from Isaiah where he proclaims that his ministry, his calling is to set free the captives to bring deliverance to those who are enslaved.

And finally when Christ is dying on the cross for the redemption of the world. Redemption from sin, he says It is finished. The work that the Lord of the sabbath came to do is now completed. The world has been redeemed, restored from the hands of the oppression of sin in the world.

By following Sabbath it is not just that you take time to rest, but that we exercise the principles of faith expressed through the act of sabbath:

Rest, freedom from bondage and forgiveness from debt. These are principles inhabited by Christ and we as disciples are also called to exercise.

For Today we can apply these truths by allowing for time for rest and restoration in our lives and the lives of others. We can also actively engage in acts of liberation, seeking to stop the cycle of exploitation of people who need care. The poor, the immigrant and the refugee are most vulnerable to these forms of modern-day slavery because of their desperate situation to survive. And lastly, we are called to acts of forgiveness – to not hold the debts of others over their heads, but rather forgive and cancel the debt, sharing our wealth and working to have a more equitable and balanced society