

Welcome

I've been wondering this week if we all should have paid more attention to *Rambo III*.

The world was rocked last weekend when the Taliban - the terrorist group responsible for 9/11 among other atrocities - swept across Afghanistan to retake the capital city. The US armed forces have been in Afghanistan for 20 years, fighting back the Taliban. When President Biden began executing a withdrawal set in motion by former President Trump, no one expected the local government to fall within a day. But we've watched with horror and trepidation over the last week, our prayers going out for the Christians of Afghanistan and the women and children who will likely bear the brunt of Taliban violence.

In our horror, it's easy for us to forget that the US military created the Taliban. Certainly that's true in part for how we've treated the Afghani people for the last two decades, but also another two decades earlier. In the 1980s, Afghanistan was occupied not by the US but by the Soviet Union. We supplied local warlords (called mujahideen) with weapons they could use to fight *our* enemies. Many of those mujahideen became Taliban soldiers after the US abandoned them when Russian pulled out of the country in 1989.

One of the starkest reminders of this is the film *Rambo III*. Released in 1988 - a year before the Soviet withdrawal, the film finds John Rambo fighting in Afghanistan alongside the mujahideen (and against the Russians of course). Talk about a movie that didn't age well.

But John Rambo is himself a warning omen. The first *Rambo* film introduces us to a man who is a veteran of the Vietnam conflict - a war that now looks like a precursor to our time in Afghanistan. Rambo embodied the sense of futility and despair experienced by our troops who returned from Vietnam.

But of course we got into the Vietnam conflict as a staging ground for the 40+ year cold war between the US and Russia. And the cold war was a direct result of the shaky alliances we made during World War II.

World War II erupted in large part because of how the fallout of World War I was handled.

All of this to say: if you're feeling helpless right now... it's okay. If you're despairing right now... that's probably normal.

What I want to ask today is: what are we supposed to do in the face of this global crisis? How can we offer a faith-filled response to the chaos and pain of our world?

Believe it or not, you're in exactly the right place. God created us for a regular rhythm of worship - a weekly rhythm. Why? Because we live in a chaotic and pain-filled world.

God invites us to be recreated every week as God's own people. This is our genesis point, the space where God recreates us and re-calls us to be agents of peace and flourishing. So let's worship!

Message

For the month of August, we're in a series called How to Get Your Groove Back. The most common experience we've had throughout the pandemic is a loss of rhythms, the structures, patterns and habits that help us navigate our lives. We made jokes about how the whole lockdown felt like a timeless void where everything was the same. Then we'd all laugh nervously and look to the side because of course it wasn't *really* a joke. We lost so many of the routines and structures that we took for granted. We lost the rhythms of life that helped us make sense of our world.

Everything began opening back up right as we entered into summer - which is another one of those times our rhythms become more fluid. Kids are out of school, we take trips. But now we're looking toward the new normal. Schools are returning to session. Summer is coming to an end.

So we want to ask over the next month how we get back into rhythms of faith. What are the practices that order our lives and lead us to life and flourishing?

We began by acknowledging that we were created to live in rhythms - daily, weekly, monthly. Last week, we reclaimed our daily rhythms by ordering our day through prayer.

Today, we're going to explore the thing we're doing together here: our weekly worship gathering. For most people, *this* is the sum total of church. We even use that language... "Do you go to church? It's time for church! Church was great today!"

When we talk about 'church' we mostly mean this weekly gathering we attend to worship.

With all the chaos, pain and fear in our world right now, it's easy to despair, to feel as though showing up to this weekly gathering isn't even worth it. After all, coming and singing songs, saying some prayers - isn't this a little like whistling as we walk through a cemetery or burying our heads in the sand as the world goes to hell in a handbasket?

No, actually. In many ways, this weekly gathering is more vital now than ever. God designed it to be a weekly rhythm for us. And it's essential to our ability to be peacemakers in our world.

Why? What does this rhythm *do*?

Turn with us to [Exodus 20](#).

A lot of us have heard the command to honor the Sabbath day - it's one of the big 10 commandments. But I want you to pay attention to *why* the Sabbath matters, according to Exodus:

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. -- Exodus 20:8–11 (NLT)

You can hear the way the Exodus version ties the Sabbath back to the creation week. A couple of things we can point out here. First is that, like those daily rhythms we explored last week, the Sabbath illustrates that God created us for a weekly rhythm. Not quite daily. But regular. Weekly.

Secondly, there's a deep concern for work here. The poem we call [Genesis 1](#) imagines God spending six days building a house so God can live in it with us. And it culminates not on day 6, but on day 7, when God stops working and actually lives with us.

There's something about work and our weekly rhythms.

Turn with us to [Deuteronomy 5](#).

We're most familiar with the version of the 10 Commandments in the book of Exodus. This is when Moses goes up the mountain and gets them from God. But there's a second version of them in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is written as a review of God's instructions before the people enter the Promised Land. It was written several hundred years after the account of the instructions we have in Exodus and Leviticus, so it's fascinating to compare the two, to see how they echo each other and how they differ. As we read this account of the fourth commandment, pay attention to the *why* of it. In Exodus, it's tied to the creation story. What's it tied to here?

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day. -- Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (NLT)

Remember you were once slaves in Egypt. God knows it's easy for us to forget we belong to God's people. We have a different set of values than the world around us.

But all too often, we forget that Egypt isn't our home, and if we're not careful, we start leaning too far into Egypt's values.

You can feel that, can't you?

In God's kingdom, we prioritize people not profits or productivity.

In God's kingdom, we're defined by love, not by our paychecks.

In God's kingdom, we live for life, not for work.

But we live in a culture that idolizes productivity. We've made a virtue out of burnout. It's toxic. It's sinful.

But it's also the world we live in day in, day out. And, as another preacher I really like says, "Culture isn't taught, it's *caught*."

We are what we do repeatedly.

Which is why God's people put so much emphasis on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we're not Egypt. We're not Rome. We're not the United States. We're not any of the Empires that dehumanize and destroy the image of God we all bear.

That remained true after Jesus' resurrection. Christians began meeting on Sunday - the day Jesus was raised from the dead - instead of Sabbath Saturday (the seventh day of the week). But the purpose was largely the same - to reculture ourselves to God's Kingdom.

Turn with us to [Revelation 4](#).

Weirdly enough, one of my favorite images of this is in the book of Revelation. After John delivers the seven letters from Jesus to the seven churches to whom Revelation is addressed, he opens his first cosmic vision with a picture of God's throne room.

For those Christians worshipping under threat of persecution in the Roman province of Asia, Sunday worship felt awfully anemic. They were poor, afraid and powerless. (Sound familiar?) So John gives them a sneak peek into Heaven to remind them that when they're gathered on Sunday to sing and pray and read Scripture, they're not doing it alone. They're not even doing it just with the other churches in Asia. They're worshipping with all of creation, celebrating the one God who is on the throne forever.

And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

“You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased.” -- Revelation 4:2–11 (NLT)

Pretty nuts, isn't it? And while we can dive in and pick apart all the various pieces, it's more fun to just sit back and let ourselves be overwhelmed by the majesty of God. The goodness of God.

And remember that it's not caesar on the throne. It's Jesus, the one who was slain and yet lives. We're *his* people. We don't belong to the workforce or to the people who want to use and dehumanize us. We don't belong to those who think we're lesser.

We belong to the one who died to liberate us from death itself.

That's easy to forget in the 9-5 grind (that's really become more of a 24/7 grind).

So we meet. Regularly. Weekly. To celebrate our true king. To remember the one in whose image we are made. To act out the virtues God gives us to give to the world.

The people of God are not to be the people of the world. And to be the people of God is *always* to be in a culture with values that run counter to the way of God.

It was true when God's people lived in Egypt.

It was true when God's people lived in Babylon.

It was true when God's people lived under Rome's boot.

It was true in the Middle Ages. It was true in the Ages of Enlightenment and Imperialism.

And it's true today.

That's why God's people have always prioritized a weekly gathering to worship. It's so important the writer of Hebrews says,

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. -- Hebrews 10:25 (NLT)

Friends, all the more these days, a weekly worship gathering is vital to our vitality. We *need* to be gathered together. We need to encourage each other. We need to remember that we're not of this culture, but of God's eternal kingdom.

We need each other. We need this weekly rhythm of worship to be God's beloved children.

Communion + Examen

Our weekly ritual to share God's table.

On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper.
-- [Acts 20:7](#) (NLT)

How in the last week have I acted like a citizen of God's kingdom?

How have I acted out the values of our culture?

When will I be tempted to act out the values of our culture?

How will I remember I belong to God this week?

Assignment + Blessing

How are we liberated? What seeds are sown here that grow into courageous acts of resistance?