



Big Sunday 31.08.2025 Sabbath

Call to worship

Welcome to Big Sunday, where we will explore the idea of Sabbath, and it may not be in the way you immediately think of as Sabbath.

We shall have a reading, poetry, a skit, reflection and of course hymns and prayers, all prepared for us by several people throughout the circuit.

And as we continue, a short prayer.

God of Rest and Rhythm,
you call us not to endless doing,
but to sacred being.
Not to frenzy, but to relief.
Not to burnout, but to life restored.

As we gather in this service,
open in us the quiet places
where your Spirit breathes
that hidden heartbeat
which keeps time with your love.

Help us to listen well:
to one another,
to the needs of our communities,
to the longings of our own hearts.

Bless our words, our wondering, our sharing,
to experience your deep Sabbath harmony,
and an invitation to rest in your goodness.

We ask this in the name of the One
who withdrew to pray,
who laid down his life,
and who rises still in love. **Amen.**

Hymn 152 This is the day
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,

that the Lord has made
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
and be glad in it
This is the day that the Lord has made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made.

This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again,
when he rose again.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it
This is the day when he rose again;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again.

This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came,
when the Spirit came.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when the Spirit came;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came.

Anonymous

Opening prayer

Written by Heather Pearle, at Hingham Methodist Church

Dear Father, We thank you for the gift of this Sabbath day.

Help us to make every Sabbath about you.

Please, we pray, quiet our hearts, give rest to our souls, refocus the Spirit within us -- for true renewal comes only from You.

Please help us to face this Sabbath with calmness, courage,
cheerfulness and complete confidence in you, whatever it may bring.

Let every detail in our lives, words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus.

Thanking God the Father every step of the way.

Amen.

Poem – Leisure

Chosen by Aileen Fox, at Swaffham Methodist Church

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

William Henry Davies (1871-1940)

Hymn 495 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess

the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

Reading Matthew 12:1-15 (NIV)

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. **2** When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? **4** He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. **5** Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? **6** I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. **7** If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,'^[a] you would not have condemned the innocent. **8** For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, **10** and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? **12** How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. **14** But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill.

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Reflection

Hilary Pegg and Jonny Bell have written a joint reflection for Big Sunday. Hilary wrote the first part, and Jonny wrote the second part.

Eddie Askew of the Leprosy Mission in his series Meditations and Prayers writes a book called 'Breaking the Rules'. He could well have written about the Christian attitude to Exodus 20, where, in verse 8, God says, 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy'. Nowadays, however, people in Europe shop on a Sunday, expecting staff to work for them. Sunday is just another day.

Many a Christian has anguished over breaking this rule about the Sabbath. It could be some comfort to know that Jesus himself broke the rules. To read about it, look at our Matthew reading, especially verses 11 and 12. They are about rescuing sheep on the Sabbath. Jesus elsewhere likens us to a little flock of sheep.

A Christian lady I know goes to watch her grandson play football on a Sunday. The Lionesses recently won a ladies' football match against Spain on a Sunday. Today, with fewer and fewer people in Europe becoming Christian (though the church is growing elsewhere), no one bats an eyelid.

So, what is Sabbath for us today when Sundays are no longer a time of rest and restoration?

Indeed, so many of us have 'jobs' to do on a Sunday just in church alone now; is this Sabbath for us?

So many of us are carers for partners, which is often a 24/7 responsibility; is this Sabbath for us?

So, what is Sabbath for us today?

I wonder if it is to do with those moments when we can be restored. This may well be on a Sunday for us, but it can be a moment or two each day, a period of time, or something else entirely. Sabbath for me, as a minister, are the times when I can do things that give me life, joy and energy. This could be going to a Queer comedy night in Norwich, it could be playing computer games, it could be painting, it could be walking the dog, seeing friends and family, spending quality time with Seb, evensong, reading, and more. These things are life-giving, joy-generating and energising for me. It is so important for me to find times to restore my soul, and I would say that this is the 'doing good' that Jesus speaks of.

So, what is Sabbath for us today, when Sunday is no longer the 'day of rest', when we have so many jobs and responsibilities that prevent us from resting? Well, I would say that it is finding moments, time and spaces for you to have Sabbath. It is to 'do good' in these moments and reenergise ourselves. Perhaps we need to stretch out our hands towards God in these moments so that we may be 'completely restored'.

I invite you, then, to consider what Sabbath means to you and how you experience it over this coming week and beyond. How do you restore your soul to find life, joy and energy?

Hymn 481 The Lord's my Shepherd

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me.
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness.
and he anoints my head with oil;
and my cup — it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights

And though I walk the darkest path
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)
© 1996 Thankyou Music.

Sketch

Written by Seb Bell, at Holt Methodist Church

Person 1: Hey! How's it going? You look... very relaxed.

Person 2: Hi. Yeah, all good. I'm in full 'Sabbath mode'. No work. No stress. Just me, my snacks, and 12 straight episodes of the new series of "Wednesday" on Netflix!

Person 1: Netflix? That's your Sabbath plan?

Person 2: Absolutely. Sabbath = Day off = Do nothing.

Person 1: Do nothing? Isn't that kind of boring though?

Person 2: Yes, I guess. I've barely moved. I'm tired from the week, so I'm not doing anything. It's justified biblical laziness!

Person 1: That's not exactly how the Sabbath works you know...

Person 2: What do you mean? God rested, right? So, I'm resting. I'm not even replying to my mum who's text me three times already today! I haven't changed my clothes since last night.

Person 1: Okay, yes. God did rest. But resting doesn't mean zoning out or procrastinating. The Sabbath is about intentional rest. It's like pressing pause to reconnect with God, with others, and even with yourself.

Person 2: So you're saying I can't have snacks?

Person 1: No, of course not. Snacks are fine. Actually, having good food can be important so you're nourishing your body as well as your spirit. But the Sabbath isn't about escaping life, it's about restoring your life. Think about it; God didn't rest because of tiredness. God was modelling a rhythm for us. A rhythm of renewal.

Person 2: So, it's not about avoiding work, it's about resting on purpose?

Person 1: Exactly. It's about things that replenish you. Like praying, spending time with people who bring life, worship, nature walks, journaling, even just sitting still and listening to God. Some of that might even be watching a little of your favourite TV show to bring you joy.

Person 2: What if my soul feels replenished by 12 episodes of watching young girl with a morbid fascination, a fondness for the dark and gruesome, with dry wit?

Person 1: I mean, God speaks in mysterious ways. But seriously, it's more about making space. We fill our lives with so much noise. Our jobs, social media, responsibilities, worries and more! The Sabbath is a time to say: "God, I'm not in control. I trust You to run the world while I rest in You."

Person 2: I mean, I have been busy this last week. So resting is important.

Person 1: And next week is likely to be busy too, so make the most of this rest!

Person 2: So less "Netflix coma," more "soul spa"?

Person 1: That would be great! Sabbath is rest with purpose.

Person 2: And that purpose isn't avoiding something?

Person 1: Right! It's not just resting from something, but resting for something.

Person 2: Okay. I'll keep the snacks, maybe swap the 12 episode binge watching for a day including a walk, and I could meet up with my mum... ooh, and maybe take her to try out that new restaurant that I keep seeing?

Person 1: Perfect. Baby steps. And I'm sure you'll feel better for doing it too!

Person 2: That's true. Sometimes I do feel like I've wasted my time off. It seems to go so fast. It's like I'm not present sometimes, just going through the motions.

Person 1: Well, here's a challenge. This week, take one hour to turn off your phone, step away from the chaos, and spend time with God. Be still. Listen. Rest on purpose.

Person 2: Just one hour?

Person 1: To start with, and you might increase it from there later. Who knows? You might find it's the most powerful hour of your week.

Person 2: Alright. One hour. And maybe... just two episodes of "Wednesday"?

Person 1: That's a good start!

Hymn 513 Take this moment, sign and space

Take this moment, sign, and space;
take my friends around:
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all can't forget.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me.

Prayers

Written by Geraldine Allen and Sarah Rodgers

Prayers for Big Sunday, based on Psalm 23

For the prayers of intercession today, we are sitting in our garden.

This is probably our favourite place for finding peace, rest and restoration and connecting with God.

Psalm 23 is the touchstone for the prayers: Let's pray

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures and walk by still waters.

We pray for all who lack the basic needs of human existence:

In places where there is drought and famine, where food and water are scarce;

In places where natural disaster of hurricane and flood have destroyed homes and ruined crops;

In places where conflict and war have broken families and shattered communities;

In places where oppression and abuse have bruised, maimed and crushed body mind and spirit;

Lord of the Sabbath, give rest and restoration.

He restores my soul, he leads me in paths of righteousness.

We pray for all who are distressed, who feel alone or face difficult decisions.

Good Shepherd, bring calm, bring space, bring light, bring inspiration.

Good shepherd, help to clear minds, reassure hearts and open up possibilities.

Good Shepherd, lead, guide and protect.

Lord of the Sabbath, give rest and restoration.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

We pray for all who are sick, are bereaved or face uncertain futures.

May the Sabbath provide healing and wholeness.

May the Sabbath give courage and understanding.

May the Sabbath keep light within and darkness without.

Lord of the Sabbath, give rest and restoration.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

We pray for ourselves and for the community of all believers.

Whatever form the Sabbath takes for each one – in rest or in play, in solitude or in company, at home or away, in making, baking or raking, generous God and giver of all things, we rest in your loving and tender care; and we are revived, restored and renewed by your strength and encouragement. You go before us in life, leading us in pathways that are secure without the confusion of becoming lost, aware only that we always need to follow you; and so we trust in your guidance and wisdom.

Lord of the Sabbath, thank you for this day of rest and restoration.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Hymn 477 Teach me to dance

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the power of your Spirit
teach me to walk in the light of your presence
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise
teach me to hope in the day of your coming.
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

You wrote the rhythm of life,
created heaven and earth;
in you is joy without measure.
So, like a child in your sight,
dance to see your delight,
for was made for your pleasure, pleasure.
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,

Let all my movements express
a heart that loves to say 'yes,'
a will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze
to see the joy in your face,
let my whole being praise you, praise you.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) and Steve Thompson
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Blessing

God of the quiet ending,
we give you thanks for the time we've shared:

for songs of worship, prayers spoken,
and the gentle sense of your presence among us.

As we now continue about our lives,
may we carry not the weight of tasks unfinished,
but the peace of knowing we are held
in your unhurried grace.

Let the seeds planted here
grow in their own time.
Let the Sabbath we long for
begin with us;
in how we pause,
how we listen,
how we make space for wonder and being enough.

Send us out not to strive harder,
but to live deeper.
To rest as an act of resistance.
To trust, even in stillness, that you are at work.

And your Spirit,
like a deep breath,
blesses us with peace,
renews us in love,
and brings us back again in hope. **Amen.**