Hi,

Oh man, #10, we are into double digits on these emails. But we press on . . .

* In my email yesterday, I included several links to recordings of my on-line classes and the podcasts of the weekday classes. By the end of the day, these links will be available on the “Scott’s Classes” page of [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)
* A few folks have asked about our Sunday class. My plan is to take that class on-line beginning on Palm Sunday. By then I will have learned how to incorporate slides into my Facebook Live class. The class will be at noon on Sunday, allowing those worshipping on-line at 11am to join the class. On Palm Sunday, the class will be a walk-through of Holy Week, from Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem to his resurrection. We will have class on Easter, during which I will focus on resurrection -- Jesus’ and our own.
* Patti and I realized yesterday that we failed to make our regular weekly donation last Sunday, so we did so right away. If you are able, please keep up your regular giving to the church.
* We finished up the series on David yesterday, so I’m going to start attaching a series on Elijah today. At the end of this time of isolation, at least we’ll know our Old Testaments a bit better.

In a way, this Time of Virus is offering many of us an invitation to Sabbath, to a time of rest and seeking after God. Here’s some reflections on Sabbath:

***Deuteronomy 5:12,15 (NRSV)***

**Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.**

**Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.**

***Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 (NRSV)***

**The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.**

**When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.**

*Compassion . . . shepherd . . . rest*

We often live frantic lives. We fill our days with so many activities and obligations that it can sometimes feel like we are barely hanging on. It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus and his disciples were often pushed hard by the crowds that came seeking healing and teaching. In today’s passage from Mark, Jesus knows that his disciples desperately need some rest and renewal. Understandably, Jesus tells them to get away, to find a deserted place and get some rest. Again, perhaps paralleling our own best intentions, the crowds foil the disciples’ plans. Jesus and his helpers simply cannot escape. Nonetheless, Jesus has compassion for the surging crowds and, like a good shepherd, sets aside his own needs and gives the throng what they had come seeking.

We misread the story if we think that all Jesus had in mind for himself and his disciples was a little time away from the office. For many of us, we manage to make vacations and other so-called “downtime” every bit as frantic as the rest of our lives. But if the “rest” of which Jesus speaks isn’t simply downtime, what is it?

*Practicing Sabbath*

Some years ago, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA urged its clergy and congregations to rediscover the gift of Sabbath. Calling on both scriptural teachings and centuries-old Christian traditions, the Presbyterians articulated well the larger sense of Sabbath among God’s people. They noted that the “gift of Sabbath” serves many purposes:

* *“Sabbath is for our joy and our rest.”* John Calvin wrote, “Work is good, but when we work all the time work becomes a curse not a blessing.” As God rested on the seventh day to rejoice in the goodness of his creation, Sabbath invites us to rest and take joy in what already is!
* *“Sabbath is for deepened communion with the Living God.”* Sabbath is a time that we set aside for God to shape us within.
* *“Sabbath draws us into the sacred rhythm God has woven into all of life and all creation.”* In addition to a Sabbath day, God commanded that his people honor a Sabbath year. Every seventh year the fields were not to be sown and the vines were not to be pruned. The land itself was to have a Sabbath to God. After seven Sabbath years there was to be a year of Jubilee, when land was to be returned to its original family, for it was God’s land, not the Israelites’ (Leviticus 25). In the Jubilee year, slaves were to be freed, just as God had redeemed the Israelites from Egypt. The Sabbath is about the need for and goodness of rest, redemption, and renewal.
* *“Sabbath is profoundly prophetic.”* Again Calvin: “Sabbath keeping is a way of living out our belief that we are not our own; that we belong to God.”
* *“Sabbath is for our life in community.”* Sabbath is not a private gift from God. The Sabbath commandment was given to Israel as the entire community of God’s people.

*Sabbath in Jesus’ Day*

The Jews were God’s chosen people. Of all the nations on the planet, God had made a covenant with them! For hundreds of years, ever since the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews had struggled to stay true to YHWH, to resist the pressures of cultural assimilation by their oppressors. There were several potent symbols of Jewish distinctiveness – and they were non-negotiable. Sabbath-keeping was one of these symbols. By definition, Jews were those who kept the Sabbath.

Of the Ten Commandments, the commandment to practice Sabbath is the most richly detailed (Exodus 20:8-11 & Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Out of his love and genuine concern for his people, God commands that they rest on one day out of seven. This rest is to be extended to all – Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female (see Galatians 3:28 for a thought-provoking parallel) – even the livestock! Further, this rest is explicitly tied to God’s redemption of his people from bondage in Egypt. Sabbath is to be a holy time, set apart for God, in whom we find true rest. Jews observed Sabbath on Saturday but marked days from sunset to sunset. Thus, the Jewish Sabbath began about 6pm on Friday. (Because Jesus was resurrected on the day after the Jewish Sabbath, Christians came to adopt Sunday as the principal day for worship.)

Keeping Sabbath was a key boundary marker setting the Jews apart from the pagans. To illustrate, In Luke 13, Jesus heals a crippled woman whose body had been in bondage to Satan for 18 years. To the dismay of the local synagogue leader, Jesus heals her on the Sabbath. Jesus’ confrontation with this leader is not really about the legal niceties of Sabbath law, but about Jesus’ frustration that so many Jews are unable to see that the great Sabbath day, the day of Israel’s release from bondage, was breaking in upon them all. Thus, after the confrontation, Jesus teaches not about the law, but about the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:18-21). As Rabbi Arthur Waskow recently wrote, “With Shabbat, we get what Jewish tradition calls a foretaste . . . of the Messianic Age, a higher Eden.”

*A site to check out*

[This is a bit of whimsy -- Ronald Searle’s illustrations from an edition of *A Christmas Carol*](http://ronaldsearle.blogspot.com/2008/01/more-dickens.html) that was published in the ‘60’s. His work brings a smile to my face and, perhaps, yours. If you click on the paintings, you will get a much larger image.

*Movie recommendation*

Back to Hitchcock today. His 1948 movie, *Rope*, was inspired by the case of Leopold and Loeb, who murdered a 14-year old boy in 1924 because they simply wanted to pull off the perfect crime using their supposed “intellectual superiority.” Hitchcock tells his story in real time using immensely long takes. The film is available for free on Starz and Spectrum and for a few dollars on Amazon and Apple.

*Book Recommendation*

If you missed Lauren Hillebrand’s *Unbroken*, now would be a good time to pick it up. An amazing story very well-told.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott