

SUNDAY 9B BIRKENHEAD 2018

We could all use a long weekend from time to time, and we luckily have one this weekend. But what if you had one every week?

In March, trust company Perpetual Guardian launched a six-week trial where its full time staff will work for four days a week but still be paid for five days. If successful, the company will implement the policy permanently from July 1.

Perpetual founder Andrew Barnes said the idea behind the four-day week was to increase productivity and start a conversation that challenged the traditional working week.

Four-day weeks could mean employees might have to work weekends and take weekdays off, he said.

The hours would not be compressed – workers would work 32 hours instead of 40 hours. All employers faced the challenge of providing their employees with a work-life balance to ensure their performance levels were strong, Barnes said. It is very interesting

to see a modern day company taking on what it is ancient concept. The idea that rest can be beneficial and even productive.

2

You may remember those days when Sundays were put aside as a day of rest and no one worked or did strenuous activity. Very few people keep that sort of day of rest any more. With so many things to do Sunday has lost something of its restful quality. No longer can it be called a day of rest. So what is the meaning of this so called day of rest? And perhaps as we are seeing, the concept of rest as a means to help us be more attentive and productive.

It is worth examining the origin of this practice of a day of rest because it is more than just refraining from work for one day a week.

You may recall from the book of Genesis that after creating the world God rested on the seventh day. It tells us God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, If you look at the West Window in the Cathedral in

Parnell you will see a figure of the risen Christ. Behind him is a ponga tree. In the end of each of the seven branches of the tree there is depicted a day of creation. The seventh day has a stick figure lying on a towel under a beach umbrella. This is God resting.

3

So God makes time sacred, Time is the thing God blessed by his rest. Time becomes the most holy thing we have. The Ten Commandments tell us how to hallow time. "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy for the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

What did the people of Israel do to make time holy? First they stopped working on the Sabbath. The other thing they did was to gather to remember. They remembered what God had done for them. In this way they marked themselves off from the surrounding nations. They had a particular day on which they gathered to worship God. When they did this they recovered their identity as the people of the covenant. They remembered their belief that they were the ones chosen by God. On the Sabbath they were to live as

though they were in union with God. It was a time to live as though they had reached the Promised Land.

4

Even though they were in the desert and on a journey, the Sabbath was the day on which they were to live as though they had arrived. Their task was simply to enjoy the presence of God. And they were to have God rejoice in their presence.

It seems to me we often spend six days of the week trying to help God continue the work of creation, On the seventh day we are to stop trying to help God, we are to stop creating. One of the images that helps to express Sabbath time for me is that of a baby in the arms of a parent. The baby can do nothing but it still has the care and love of its parents. We are to be like babes in the arms of God. We are simply to allow ourselves to be loved for being who we are, not for what we do. Our day of rest is to be a reminder to us of our identity as Children of God. We are loved by God without having to do anything to win that love.

5

Keeping the Sabbath is not simply about keeping rules that tell us not to work. It's about re-establishing our identity as the people of God. It's about knowing our value and worth to God. When we realise our identity is with God, then the rest of our time will also be hallowed. We will see that our day of rest is the way we are to live during the week. It is the outcome of our Sabbath practices that is important as today's Gospel reminds us.

When Jesus asked the people about whether he should do good or do harm on the Sabbath he was showing them that Sabbath is not about laws. His healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath showed the people that doing good to others was required on any day of the week. Bringing new life is the aim of any Sabbath practice

6

Of course this put Jesus in opposition to the authorities who then set out to destroy Jesus. Mark's Gospel which we read this year sets out to show us how Jesus established new ways for his kingdom to be established. This one is a reminder to us about the true purpose of the Sabbath.

We keep Sunday as our day of rest because it is the day of the resurrection. This day supersedes all others and is sometimes referred to as the eighth day. Of course the resurrection tells us the day is to be about life. What we do on a Sunday is to be life-giving. So we are to make the day holy by setting it aside from our work. We are to allow God to hold us and rejoice over us for who we are not for what we do. It is a day to worship God and to remember whose we are. Our identity is to be the people of God. We are members of the church, the Body of Christ present now in the world. We come here to realign ourselves with the life of God as shown us in the life of Jesus. Then the rest of the week will also be like a Sunday. All we do will be to seek to worship God.