“Save the Dates”
Leviticus 23:1-44
Series: The Way Home Week 4: Open Your Days
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A few summers ago, I initiated my grandsons Ben and Isaac into the sacred Hoglund tradition of Camping. I believe we Höglunds are descended from Vikings. It is in our blood to cast aside all comforts, to plunge into forbidding forests, to laugh in the face of menacing wild beasts. I taught them to hammer in tent stakes without hitting their thumbs (I should have also showed them how to avoid my thumb). They learned to inflate an air mattress (only popped one). And though the weather app guaranteed clear night skies, they now know a tent always attracts rain showers. Although it was a difficult, strenuous, hard-fought battle between man and nature, they survived to tell the tale of their first camping trip. Next time we’ll try some place besides the backyard…which is good, because when I lit the fire pit for the smores, I set my lawn on fire.

A lot can go wrong when you camp. Air mattresses go flat in the night, tents drip through a three-day deluge and outhouses are too far when you need one and too close when you don’t. Yet some of my favorite memories were in a tent. There were hikes up to Bear Mountain where I could see to the edge of eternity, sunsets on Cranberry Lake with the sky on fire, songs, stories and roasted smores around a crackling campfire.

The Lord must love to go camping. In the Bible you often find God in a tent. The whole Exodus is one long forty-year camping trip. As we saw last week, the Lord descended to the “Tabernacle” or "Tent of Meeting” in the center of their sprawling camp. In Leviticus 23, Moses outlines a year of festivals which the Israelites celebrate in the desert and continue in the Promised Land. The festival of Booths tells them to live in tents. In Jesus day, when they hold the festivals in Jerusalem, nearly every visitor, including Jesus, lives in a tent. Why? This helped them relive the experience of the Exodus. Camping renewed their relationship with God. The festivals reminded how God shaped Israel into a nation during the Exodus.

1. He frees them slavery through the plagues and crossing the Sea
2. He feeds them with manna, quail and water from the Rock
3. He forms them into an organization with judges over 1000s, 100s, 50s, and 10s
4. He founds them on the principles of the 10 Commandments and Laws
5. He fills their camp with His Presence in the Tabernacle

Now God gives them a Framework for their Time. In Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28, Moses gives them God’s Calendar of Festivals. Through the festivals, He focuses them on their relationship with Him all through the year. These holy days call Israel to pause, remember His faithfulness and rejoice together. God is shaping the way they spend their time.

How do you spend your Time? Time is more precious than money. You can make more money, but you can’t make more time. Calendars help us spend our time wisely. Unfortunately, our calendars are overcrowded. There’s a schedule for sports, band, dance, drama, school, work, holidays, family, church and volunteering. You fight to get these schedules to cooperate so you are

not in six places at the same time. You are in a WWE wrestling match with Time. You can hear the struggle when we say: *Where does the time go? There aren't enough hours in the day. So much to do, so little time. We're running out of time. It's a race against time. Time waits for no one.*

Focusing on Time is so important I asked both political parties if they would stop wasting your time with all the campaign attack ads. They said, "No." So I asked them to give you an extra hour this weekend. Then I got Pennsbury to give you a four-day weekend. You have plenty of Time to think about Time. God gives you the Time and directions for how to spend it. He wants you to "save the dates," to make every day sacred. Let's look at the major festivals so you can:

1. Understand their purpose in the Old Testament
2. See how they are fulfilled in the New Testament
3. Add these spiritual practices to your calendar

The first and most basic unit of holy time is the **Sabbath**.

> There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord. Leviticus 23:3

The Israelites were the first ancient people to require a day off for everyone. The Lord built this rhythm of work and rest into creation when He rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3). Even servants, foreigners and animals get a Sabbath. In addition to rest, the people come together for a sacred assembly or worship. The Lord also proclaims every seventh year to be a **Sabbath Year** (Leviticus 25:1-7)**.** The land is allowed to rest and all people, including the poor, eat what the land produces naturally or what they store up.

When seven Sabbath Years pass, a total of 49 years, the 50th year is called **the Year of Jubilee** (Leviticus 25:8-55). It is a nationwide reset or do-over. Debts are cancelled, slaves and servants are freed, land returns to the original owners. The Jubilee reminds the Israelites they are descended from freed slaves and the Promised Land is a gift from God. It is a celebration of freedom. The Lord says,

> Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. Leviticus 25:10

Those words sound familiar because they are cast in bronze on the Liberty Bell. These three Sabbath times: the Seventh Day, the Seventh Year, and the 50th Year remind the Israelites that Time is a gift from God to be used for Rest and for Release of those in Bondage. In the New Testament Jesus practices the Sabbath. He tells us

> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. Matthew 12:8,12; Mark 2:27

Later, the book of Hebrews tells us there will be an eternal Sabbath. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9). Every Sabbath is practice and preparation for heaven, for the eternal rest God is preparing for us.

> There are three early Spring Festivals: **Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits**.
> The Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord's Festival of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. Leviticus 23:5-6

Every year, down to the present, Jews relive how God delivered them from slavery by celebrating the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The blood of the lamb saved them death and freed them from bondage. Last year we celebrated the Passover here with our friends from Congregation Brothers of Israel. Jesus' last supper with His disciples was a Passover Meal. By His death on the Cross the next day He becomes, as John the Baptist says, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Later, Paul says,

> For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I Corinthians 5:7-8

Every time we celebrate Communion we remember how the blood of Jesus the Lamb made death pass over us. We become bread without the yeast of sin and selfishness which puffs us up.

> The Feast of First Fruits celebrated the Spring harvest of barley.
> When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf. Leviticus 23:10-11

By offering the first sheaf to the Lord, you thank Him for all the harvest that is to come. This festival also involved the sacrifice of a lamb. Later, in the New Testament, Paul writes,

> Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. I Corinthians 15:20

Jesus the Lamb of God is also the first one raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of a coming harvest when we will be raised from death to eternal life.

> In late Spring the Lord told His people to celebrate the **Feast of Weeks or Shauvot**.
> From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. Leviticus 23:15-16

The Feast of Weeks is fifty days or a week of weeks after the Passover. Originally, it was a celebration of the wheat harvest. During Jesus' time, it also commemorated when the Lord gave the Ten Commandments and the Law. The Rabbis figured it took fifty days to travel from Egypt to the Mount Sinai. It is the second of the three festivals which require Jews to come to Jerusalem.

Pentecost, which means fifty, is the Greek name for the Feast of Weeks. Knowing there would be Jews from all over the world in Jerusalem God chose this day for a new beginning.

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. Acts 2:1-5

As God descended on Mount Sinai with wind and fire to give the Covenant and the Law written on stone, now, God the Holy Spirit descends with wind and fire to give the New Covenant and the Law written on our hearts.

The final three Festivals occur in the fall: **Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles or Booths.** Trumpets is a day of rest which, today, is celebrated by Jewish people as Rosh Hashanah or New Year. This starts a time of fasting, reflection and repentance which leads to the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. On this day, the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies and performs sacrifices to cleanse himself and the people of their sins for another year.

> This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you— because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins. Leviticus 16:29-30

Hebrews identifies Jesus as the Great High Priest and the sacrifice which atones for our sin.

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:19-22

Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths asks the people to live in tents or shelters to remember their journey from Egypt to Canaan and to give thanks for God's gift of the land.

> Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 23:42-43

Tabernacles is the third festival that requires Jews to come to Jerusalem. The Gospel of John says

> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. John 7:37-39

What can we learn from God's Calendar? How does He want us to use His gift of Time?

- **Rest** – this is a recurring theme in the weekly Sabbaths and the annual Festivals. The Lord designed us to rest and take a break. You will break if you don't take a break. Build real rest into your week, month and year. This includes doing nothing and really resting.
- **Rejoice** – At festivals, the nation assembled to celebrate with loud singing, dancing, food and worship. God wants you to know joy. We don't ***have*** to worship, we ***get*** to worship. Worship reminds us God is in control and God is bigger than our problems. Pause weekly to praise God and it will put everything in its proper perspective. In December we will hold a special Christmas Offering called **Elevate**. We want to transform our worship places – the Vineyard and Sanctuary – so we can rejoice even more.
- **Release** – A key feature for Sabbaths and Festivals is releasing burdens. The festivals included outsiders, freed prisoners and slaves, atoned sinners, gave rest to workers and fed the hungry. Next Sunday, this Church will Leave the Building and serve many who are burdened and in need. It is one of the most joyous weekends of Woodside's year. It is one of the very best investments of your time. Make sure to sign up for a project before you leave today.
- **Remember** – Finally, the Festivals remind Israel and us of all the Lord did for us through the Exodus, the Cross, the Resurrection and Pentecost. He created us, saved us, filled us and opened the door to eternity for us. Every day is a gift from God. Every day is an opportunity to pause, remember and give thanks for all God has done, is doing and will do for you.

It's also good to remember what God has done for your family who are no longer here, who, because of the Lord's salvation, now wait for you in heaven. You are probably aware that we've said goodbye to many dear loved ones recently at Woodside. I'd like to reclaim a Christian festival which many have forgotten: All Saints Day – November 1. This is the day we remember and give thanks for our loved ones who wait for us in the House of the Lord. A common practice for churches on this day is to read the names of those who have gone to be with the Lord in the past twelve months. Let's remember and give thanks for the time they had here on earth and the eternity they enjoy now thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus: Russell Bellmont, John Bilcik Sr, Joyce Brady, Sean Brown, William Hall, Orville Hutchens, John McGinley, Lynne Murray, Timothy Nagle, Scott Nelson, Richard Peterson, Joan Reigel, Barbara Royce, Lawrence Royce, Ruth Roeper, Norman Rombach, Edward Socha, Lois Socha, Peggy Wilson.

We bless the memory of each one, we miss them deeply and we give thanks for the salvation Jesus won for them on the Cross. And thanks to Jesus, when we are done living in the temporary tent of this mortal body, when we will end our earthly camping trip, we'll join them in the House of the Lord. That will be the greatest celebration and festival of all.