

Eternal Rhythm

“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you ...” John 6:27.

You may or may not be an Olympic Games enthusiast and either way that’s absolutely okay! With so much attached and surrounding the actual events, there’s a lot for people to digest. Yet, when you strip away all the extras and focus simply on the athletes and the skills they execute, it’s hard not to appreciate the dedication and work that it takes to compete for a medal on this world stage.

One of the ways, that I’ve noticed and appreciated these Olympic athletes’ skills is in their practiced patterns and rehearsed rhythms. It doesn’t matter which event you choose, each skill and the individuals executing that specific skill have created regular routines that prepare them for what is to come. These rehearsed rhythms provide focus and stability especially when adversity hits during the event.

Now, we don’t have to be Olympic athletes to understand and appreciate rhythms that provide focus and stability throughout our own lives. Each of us could likely dissect our personal lives and point out certain rhythms that we have. A current example for many might be the changing shift from summer rhythm into work or school rhythm. With this first weekend in August, lots of people are prepping for a transition into a different rhythm that will carry them through the next several months.

In our weekend readings from Exodus and John, it may not seem like we hear a lot about rhythm. There’s a lot said about bread, but not so much rhythm. Yet, the way the Lord designs for His people to receive His Bread highlights an eternal rhythm that God has in mind for His followers. And this eternal rhythm from the Lord establishes focus and stability in a sin-sick world.

Starting with the Israelites from our Exodus reading, we are brought into the middle of a much larger account. The people of Israel had recently exited Egypt by the Lord’s mighty power and were now heading to the land that had been promised to their forefather Abraham. But before they would arrive in this greatly anticipated land, they had to endure wilderness travel. Early on in this journey in the wilderness, the people grumbled about the scarcity of food.

Unable to hold onto the mighty works God had just done for them to free them from Egypt, the people of Israel wallowed with regret at having left a place where food was plentiful, even if it was a place of slavery for them. Graciously, the Lord heard and answered His grumbling people. He provided manna and quail for them to eat.

When providing this manna, the Lord setup a regular rhythm for receiving this heavenly food. For five days, the people of Israel would collect their daily portion of manna and then on the sixth day they would collect a double portion so that they could rest from collecting on the seventh day of the week. This rhythm connected them back the rhythm of how God created the heavens and the earth as well as prepared them for life in the Promised Land. For forty years, Israel would eat manna in the wilderness, all the while practicing this rhythm that the Lord had established.

Fast forward hundreds of years, we get some commentary on this rhythm from our reading from John’s Gospel. The large crowd that Jesus had fed in another wilderness, tracked Jesus down on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As they approached Jesus, He knew they were seeking Him for merely temporal reasons – to have their bellies filled again – so He begins to redirect them.

Jesus tells them, **“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”** (John 6:27) The crowd engages Jesus’ comments searching for what sort of righteous labor they should be doing. And Jesus responds telling them that faith in Him was what they should be seeking. Unable to hold onto the miracle feeding they had just experienced from Jesus, this crowd asks for a sign from Him something like the manna feeding that happened with Moses and the Israelites. Jesus reveals to them that God was the source of the manna then and that He, Jesus, God in the flesh, the Bread of Life, was their source of life now.

From Jesus' comments the purpose for this rhythm becomes clear. Beyond just getting the Israelites' of Moses day food in the wilderness, the rhythm with the manna focused and stabilized the people on God and His Word the true source of their provision in the wilderness. Likewise, with the people of Israel in Jesus' day, the feeding of the 5000 reintroduced this eternal rhythm that had been forgotten and lost. Remembering the sabbath, wasn't a work of God to be done, but a work of God to receive as He provided and cared for His people. Jesus hadn't come to be served by His people, rather He had come among His people to serve and reconnect them to Himself the Bread of Life.

Fast forward hundreds of more years and we come to our present moment. And even now in this generation, this eternal rhythm that our Lord established at creation, reintroduced in the wilderness and beside the Sea of Galilee is the same rhythm He desires for His Church, for us, now. Remembering the sabbath remains a rhythm focused on receiving not doing – a rhythm centered upon Christ, the Bread of Life, our source of life still today.

Just as with the people of Israel in Moses' day and Jesus' day, sin constantly tries to disrupt this rhythm. For the people of Moses' day, the scarcity of the wilderness caused them to lose focus on God their provider as they worried about what had or hadn't been provided. For the people in Jesus' day, the convenience of Jesus miraculously and abundantly providing for all their physical needs was their hearts' desire causing them to lose focus on God their Savior.

Both disruptions still impact us too. Overwhelmed by our lack and the scarcity that surrounds us, it is far too easy for us to lose sight of God as our faithful provider. Then we too find ourselves grumbling against the Lord's servants and ultimately against the Lord Himself in fear and uncertainty. Other days, desiring the physical abundance the Lord once provided sets us on an endless chase for temporal gain and security all the while missing our greatest need for Him as our Savior.

This is why our God continues to call us back into His eternal rhythm in worship. Through Word and Sacrament, our God continually connects us to Himself by this eternal rhythm of reception. Here in this space, He delivers in, with and under physical means, of words, water, bread and wine, His eternal promises. Here in this place, our God serves us both physically and spiritually to remind and reassure us that He is and remains our faithful provider and Savior. Here in the midst of life's sinful pace, our God puts us back into rhythm focused and stabilized on Him and His Word.

This rhythm that God has in mind for His people this side of heaven is done in community. In our Exodus reading we see that it wasn't just Moses or Aaron or Miriam who participated, it was the entire Israelite nation. Even during Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus didn't reintroduce this rhythm to His disciples but to the entire crowd who followed Him. And so, it remains for Christ's Church today! This divine rhythm to life is something for you and me, for our families and friends, for those brand new to and those well-seasoned in the Christian life so that we might not be tossed to and fro by the waves of our current age's false teachings but instead grow up and mature into the people Christ has called us to be.

Brought back into rhythm once again this weekend, by God's grace we seek to keep this rhythm throughout our daily lives. Centering and prioritizing God's Word in our lives outside of these walls, a pattern is created that keeps our focus and stability on God our faithful provider and Savior. Then as adversity hits in this sin-sick world we are prepared to endure until He calls us home. Tomorrow, next week, the next forty years, for the rest of our lives may the Lord keep us in this eternal rhythm of receiving from and relying on Him both physically and spiritually. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan