

A sermon preached on the Third Sunday in Lent, March 15, 2009 by The Reverend Dr. Syl Lorenzo Shannon at Bush Hill Presbyterian Church, 4916 Franconia Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22310
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ON TYING DOWN THE LOOSE ENDS

Text: Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day. Six days a week are for your regular work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God. . . .
(Exodus 20:8-10)

First, let me express my gratitude to the Bush Hill Church Family—especially the Session and Pastor Carl Rush for permitting me this opportunity. Now I am mindful that Skip Mosby and Bennie Mosby have been two of the best parishioners or church dwellers one could hope to met and follow around. This couple were in their twenties and planning for marriage when I met them in the spring of 1973. Skip, a Lieutenant in the US Army Transportation and Bennie a school teacher in the Dependent School of Fort Benning, Georgia ----they wanted me to read the marriage vows for them. Some couples ran the other way when I gave them the detailed assignments for Marriage Preparation: 12 Classes including conversations with an attorney and their medical doctor. Some written examinations on marriage expectations, money management and temperament analysis. The works!

The truth is I was a re-tread Infantry Officer on my third assignment to the Infantry School and Center but my first there as a chaplain. . . and I wanted to make a good impression on this couple and the Chief Chaplain on base. . . not to mention the *impression I wanted to make on our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!* I told my wife, Doris she might not have married me if we were going through all the tasks this couple did. Well - - here we are in my favorite family church almost thirty-six years later. The marriages and baptisms of their two children and now the second baptism of one of their grand children. Thanks to the Mosby and Rodriguez families, I can proclaim and you ought proclaim too: ***Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good! For the Lord's lovingkindness is forever. (Psalms 118:29).***

Today's Old Testament Lesson is from the Ten Commandments . . .The Decalogue. God's face book message to you and me. ***Remember the sabbath. . .and keep it holy.*** This morning: We should give thanks to God for the way God has nurtured these two families . . . and brought them together through Karen and BC. When I baptized BC at Grace Presbyterian Church in Winston Salem, North Carolina where Skip was a deacon, Many of us would never miss ***Dallas*** on Friday nights. ***JR . . .and who shot him were the main fare on television.*** Blue laws were in effect and you could not buy a beer on Sundays. Many businesses did not open for business at all on Sundays. Thank God for the Hasidic Jews and Orthodox Seventh Day Adventist who still live out their understanding of this commandment. . . ***on this day you are to do no work of any kind, nor shall your son, daughter, or slaves ---or your cattle or your house guests.***

Whether you are Protestant or Catholic, Hindu or Muslim. . .The Lord God is waiting for your acknowledgment. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is within them. Jesus loves the little children. . .ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD. . .red and yellow. . . black and white...all are precious in his sight! This text tells us to ***get with it!***

O God, so often we have come before Thee presenting our feebleness. Today, we come presenting such strength as is ours. Take it and use it as thy graving tool to carve thy will in the world." (These prayer words are from Harry Emerson Fosdick and will go far in reminding us that we are not as innocent as we think). ***I am Jehovah, your God who liberated you from your slavery in Egypt. You may worship no other god than me I will not share your affection with any other god!***

From Ash Wednesday to Easter lots of people give up something for Lent. Families try to spend more time at the dinner table; some folks give up chocolate; others give up face book or texting. Today I want to suggest we take on something. . .we may have overlooked: Listen carefully to God. Follow God's example. ***So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work. (Genesis 2:3)***

What is our strength? Our strength is that we know what kind of God we want . . .and do spend so much of our time formulating our Gods. We decide what we wish to do, and make a list----- did you see Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman in the movie, **Bucket List**? They were room mates in the hospital. . .and while facing the reality that all of their future may not remain theirs. What do you have on your short list of things you simply ***must do before you meet your maker?***

Friends: We spend so much time making lists, and tying down loose ends. God wants us to simply cool it. ***Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28).***

The first lesson of the day is: God took time to rest . . .why can't we? I had to be bedridden to give this proper thought. You have to admit it is dangerous theology to try and improve on God. Therefore, when God himself--or herself rested, why are there so many of us workaholics who can only let go when we are totally exhausted---fall off to sleep or turn ill? Isn't there something terrible about the pride involved in this?

Now think about this: God did not bless the days of work while creating the birds of the air; fish of the sea, and "every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." God did not even bless the day he made "male and female." No, God blessed the day on which he did nothing! This Lent will you not only give a little praise of rest. . . . but set aside a place for quiet rest. Be still and know God during this important season.

My niece called from Raleigh, NC early last week and said: "Uncle Syl . . . I lost my job. I was laid off!" Several years ago, I could not have given this wise counsel. "Honey, do not despair. . .use this time to ask God ***"What will you have me do next??"***

Have I convinced you to try ***tying down your loose ends*** before such becomes a necessity? It is hard to see God the Creator when you are speeding along---whether upon cars, horses, subway or highway---and that is why some of us speed along. We do not wish to see God. We want to escape God and one another. We want most of all to escape from ourselves. . .as William Sloane Coffin puts it: "We are afraid that if we stopped to pay a call upon ourselves, we'd find nobody home."

The second lesson of the day is addressed to those who are workaholics. Those who are today caught up in the rat race (like I was thirty years ago), I plead with you. . . get out of the race. It is nearly impossible to feel the nearness and dearness of God when you are speeding along at break-neck speed.

The real tragedy is we are at home in our heads. We are at home with our families...even when we cannot talk about our pains. We sit in hospital rooms with new found friends like Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson did. We dare to be more lovable because we find that everyone knows that **people are for loving and not hurting**. . . just test yourself! Get a copy of the 17 Questions from the table in the narthex (or foyer, to some) and get to know someone you love. It could be Big Auntie or Gramps---Grandfather or Grandmother. It might be a cousin or a neighbor's cousin. Everybody has a story. Write it out. Put it on DVD or video. Make an audio tape.

Take a vacation right at home or just down the street. Use the church library. Use the kitchen table. Remember: **There is somebody in your community...in your world who is waiting to know you. Hoping you will share An-At-Home-Vacation with them.** Sounds crazy. No really.

Do you remember when Jesus told the sick man to "Stand up, roll up your sleeping mat and go home!" The Bible says **Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up the mat and began walking! (John 5:9)** The Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus as a Sabbath breaker. The man had been sick for 38 years. Jesus healed him, and those who should have delighted that a neighbor was healed were quarreling over the rules concerning the Sabbath. Jesus' short answer is: **The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** Would to God we could live like it! One final lesson for this day:

One day the disciples were shooing the children away. Jesus said: **No! No! Let the children come. . .and forbid them not!** Our churches would grow faster and stronger if we came to understand this lesson. Last Sunday the Youth and Young Adults taught us much with their musical. Today the Rodriquez Family and the Mosby Family demonstrates what a Christian merger is about. Generations from now the children of Melanie and Melanie chosen helpmate will bring their child forward in an American sanctuary. Thanks be to God! We are all in the business of tying down loose ends. AMEN.