



# SABBATH AS RESISTANCE SUMMARY

**Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now**

**Walter Brueggemann (John Knox Press)**

Brueggemann offers a challenging reframing of sabbath.

When the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, they were part of an economic system that never rested. Their sole purpose was to make bricks, in response to an ever increasing, relentless demand. The system did not rest and nor did they.

Once God had rescued the people of Israel God gave them ten commands by which to live. Brueggemann suggests a pattern in the 10 commandments:

- Commandments 1-3 are about who God is and the appropriateness of responding in worship and faithfulness.
- Commandment 4 acts as a bridge – keep the sabbath holy as a day of worship and rest, a holy-day.
- Commandments 5-10 outline different ways in which God's people are to live out their relationship with each other – don't murder, covet, steal, bear false witness, commit adultery or dishonor your parents.

One of the things that strikes Brueggemann is that after God created all thing, God rested. God did not worry about creation. God did not fear what might happen when the creator rested for a day. God is not anxious. God is not driven. Brueggemann notices that in the anxious Egyptian system (there aren't enough bricks) the possibility of rest is impossible. Now Gods' people have been liberated from the driven, relentless economic system, they are free to rest and worship.

Brueggemann suggests that commandments 5-10 are about neighbourliness, about our relationships one with another. Commandment 10, Brueggemann suggests is the overarching commandment – do not covet. The commandments that precede each have their roots in covetousness – to covet possessions or people, to covet power or significance, to covet security or belonging; cravings for things or people. Brueggemann wonders, when actions are rooted in coveting, are we striving to make ourselves 'god'?

Brueggemann suggests that our own culture of consumerism is also a culture and economy that is highly anxious and doesn't rest. The market has to be fed. We desire more and more things or experiences. We are endlessly busy. Our culture doesn't rest. Our culture and economic system are also characterised, as in Egypt, by anxiety, fear and drivenness; the system relentlessly demands more and more of us.

Brueggemann suggests that we can only follow God's example of seventh day rest, to take a sabbath, if we choose to love God and if we choose to develop habits that avoid covetousness. As we rest from the economic system of consumerism and its relentless pressures, we choose not to be anxious or fearful, we give our time and ourselves to worship God and to human relationships – to neighbourliness. Brueggemann suggests that Sabbath becomes the place where we recognize we live by gift, not by possession, that we are satisfied by relationships of attentive faithfulness not by amassing commodities. Sabbath becomes something that transforms us.

Perhaps Jesus had this potential for transformation in Sabbath rest in mind when he said: No one can serve two masters... Do not be anxious... Matthew 6:24-25.

Summary written by Sandra Cobbin.

