

The busyness of the Christmas season has passed us by and now we are enjoying, apart from the heat, the relative quietness of the first couple of weeks of the New Year. These couple of weeks each year can almost seem like time to draw breath as we prepare for the busyness and responsibilities of another year. This shift is a gift to us of the secular world – it sort of stops for a bit.

Here in Australia we have our rituals – test matches in Melbourne and Sydney, Sydney to Hobart yacht race – for the bulk of us all symbols of relaxation and recreation.

Within the Hebrew Scriptures this principle of stopping was giving the imprimatur of God. Firstly was the Sabbath and secondly the year of Jubilees.

Most of us know about the Sabbath – the command to observe it as a day of rest and worship, with some quite significant penalties for non-observance. I always remember a scene from Chariots of Fire. Eric Liddell is leaving church on a Sunday and a young boy is playing football (rugby) and he gently chides him but says he will play football with him the next day. His friends ask him why he promised to play football with the boy. Eric's reply is that he didn't want the lad thinking the Lord was a killjoy. The purpose of the rest is twofold – firstly that we may be reminded that our true focus is on God who is the source of life; secondly that we ourselves should rest as part of the rhythm of life. Our community looks to rest at this time – but have we at the same time refocussed ourselves on the author of life?

One of the other things people sometimes do at this time of the year is to reassess their lives, there is a sense that a new year brings with it new opportunities that may enable us to live better in this forthcoming year. Sometimes in this context we will speak of New Year resolutions. This in some sense runs parallel to the idea of the year of jubilee. In this year, once every 50 years, all debts were forgiven and slaves freed. It was a time to clear the slate of those negative things which had accumulated and start fresh. Each one of us at points in our lives need to do that, we all accumulate elements in our lives which are not life-giving and we need to clear ourselves of these things and start fresh. This is not something that happens every year, but does so on a few times in our lives and the lives of our communities. New Year is a time that reminds us of this. If this is such a time for you may you have the courage to leave behind that which you need to and strike out confidently and lighter into the future.