

Rest for our Souls
Genesis 2: 1-3, Matthew 11:28-30
August 18, 2019

It is good to be back with you after two weeks of vacation. Our family traveled to the closest thing we have to a family cabin. Sara's dad and his wife Kay have a place in Deerfield Beach, Florida where they spend the winter, and they are generous about leaving the door open for other members of the family. It's hot, but the price is right. The beach is close, and pools are closer, so it's a refreshing option.

Sara's dad lives in a gated retirement community of 20,000 people. This is the Florida version of a family cabin. Many of the residents are from Montreal, and speak French. We played at the pool with children who were speaking French and English as they stayed in Grandma and Grampa's place like we were doing. You never know what might happen inside the gates. There was an accident in our parking lot as one woman ran into another vehicle because she was taking out her garbage by driving to the dumpster with her full trash bags on her hood. After arguing with the owner of the vehicle she ran into, this driver put the trash bags on her trunk and continued on her way.

Many of the residents in this community are Jewish, as well. There's a synagogue within the gates, but no church, which tells you something of the makeup of this community and the origins of the community. On the Friday nights when we were there, as we were going outside the gates to a restaurant, we would see men wearing yamakas and women in dresses, groups of friends walking to the synagogue for shabbat. We'd see the same on Saturday morning too.

It's always moving to me, comforting, I guess, to see a community gathering for worship and continuing a sabbath practice. I feel the same on Sunday mornings when I see people filing into the church, talking, connecting, resting, contemplating. I feel the same when I've visited Friday prayers at a mosque and I see Muslim women and men filing in for prayers. It is no small thing in today's culture for people of faith to stop at a scheduled time, to step away from all that everyone else is doing, to step away from all that needs to be done, to worship, to remember, to give thanks, and simply be.

Those who put together the Narrative Lectionary suggested that churches take a few weeks over the summer to focus on the Biblical theme of Sabbath. It suggests that churches rehearse these themes regularly, that we need to remember the importance of Sabbath. We forget.

Last week Pastor Lauren spoke of the "why" of Sabbath. She said that Sabbath practice is there "to make us come alive again." Sometimes we think that if we are stopping for Sabbath practice we are going to miss out on life, but our tradition is saying that the opposite is true. Sabbath practice is here so we can live life to the fullest. She quoted Walter Brueggemann as saying that "Exhausted people do not make for transformers of a community." He says that "rested people are dangerous people." With rest and new eyes, having come back to life, rested people can see what is life-denying and then live differently, and challenge that which is preventing it.

The first book on my vacation reading list was a book about changes in baseball titled, “The MVP Machine: How Baseball’s New Nonconformists Are Using Data to Build Better Players.” It also tells you why the Twins are doing better this year than they have in the past. In the book they talk about a “growth mindset” everyone needs a growth mindset. Anyone can grow, even the best players.

I’ve been thinking about “what is needed” for Sabbath practice. I think it is a “grace mindset.” As we sink into this “grace mindset” we will find rest for our souls.

In our passage from Genesis for today, God has just created the universe in six days. Not a bad week’s worth of work. God works and works and works, always creating, so excited about all that is new and different, accomplishing and producing, and then God stops. Pastor Kara Root of Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis says “its almost as though God has other things to do and be, other facets of personality, other interests and thoughts and isn’t defined solely by the act of creating!” This makes me wonder about God’s hobbies. Does God like to learn or play during time off?

What seems important about this story is the message that rest is built into the rhythm and fabric of creation itself. Grace, is built into the rhythm and fabric of creation itself. Important as telling the story of the origins of the universe is telling the story of the origins of Sabbath practice. As this story is told, Sabbath is part of everything that is. You can’t take it out. You can’t remove it. It’s baked in the cake. Holy Love creates, and holy love rests. There’s

work and it stops. There's work and there's freedom. Those are the first things for us to know. First story. We'll get to the details later, but, first story: God works. God rests. There's even gift and grace for God.

We then, are invited into this divine rhythm: to practice it, to pattern our lives around it. Jesus offers another invitation again, in a way that is about work and more: worry, the many pressures and challenges that life presents to us. For those of us who are weary, carrying heavy burdens, Jesus promises rest, not just for our bodies, but for our souls, our weary hearts. The promise here is that there's grace.

We too can let go. We too can stop. We are not in this alone. It is not all up to us. We are not God, we are creatures, so who are we to think we are called to hold it all, charging forward without ceasing? Even God stopped after six full days of work. Jesus understands this and invites us into this way of life, this divine rhythm, **this grace mindset**. We can trust and find true rest.

To find this rest for our souls, we will need to surrender. To trust that baked into existence is gift, and that if we stop and lay our burdens down, we will discover that grace is doing more in our midst than we knew or could imagine.

I speak and reflect on these scriptures as a Sabbath backslider. Sabbath practice has been a central spiritual practice of mine throughout my ministry. Monday has been my holy

day. Sunday too, but we all know that the one hour a week when pastors are working is on Sunday morning, so Sunday isn't the best day of rest for pastors.

When I decided to run for office, though, this sabbath practice has disappeared. I've had more to do, no doubt about that, and louder voices in my ears saying, "You can't stop. You need to keep working. More bricks please." Who has time for Sabbath? How self-indulgent is that? At the same time it is my faith that has led me to take this leap.

I empathize with those who feel like they are in a system where they are caught and have more and more pressure on them to do more. I realize too the importance of community for sabbath practice. It is hard when you are one person trying to stop, while an entire culture and system keeps going, and you feel like others must be looking at you saying, "what are you stopping for?" That's why I think it is so comforting for me to see people practicing sabbath together. Community and culture that supports sabbath is very important.

My vacation time was great. It was truly relaxing and renewing, a Sabbath season. I was able to look again at the systems I'm in with new eyes. Time will tell if I emerged a dangerous person.

But I experienced again the gift and grace of rest. I was reminded of what I knew and found so easy to forget and ignore.

The Wendell Berry poem that we prayed together as our Call to Worship this morning is a favorite of mine. I hear it saying the same thing as our passage from Genesis two and Matthew 18. “That we may reap, great work is done while we’re asleep.” It names the lie that everything is up to us alone. It names the lie that we are God. We are not. We have work to do, such important work to do. But we are creatures in a universe where work and rest are baked in. Then the poem reveals what our faith reveals, “there is grace doing more than we realize.” We are held in this love that is mysterious and active, and we add our work to this love and then discover there is so much more happening than our actions alone.

I love growth. I’m drawn to it. Gardens, trees, growth in children and adults. I love it. It keeps me connected to grace. I planted some sunflower seeds in the garden this year. Some are 10 feet tall. I have never had anything in the garden 10 feet tall, and I have done even less work in the garden this year. Less weeding and tilling because I’ve been reading about how good things happen in the soil when you don’t till and there’s a diversity of plants. Above ground on these 10 foot sunflowers, the bumblebees are flying around, multiple species of bees are on the plants, beetles are crawling all over, butterflies are flitting by, goldfinches are feasting and singing. How can I possibly be responsible for all of that? There’s so much I didn’t do. I just put the seed in the ground. Since then I’ve been sleeping. I’ve been on vacation. I’ve been working. I’ve been doing things beside willing this sunflowers to reach 10 feet in height. I can see the great work that’s done while we’re asleep. And I’m seeing grace.

Then I wonder if that same grace that I see doing such amazing things is not just confined to the garden, but is present in other parts of my life and our existence together. Our scriptures tell us it is. Can I take the lesson of the miracle of seed to sunflower, where I have done so little, but I can see that God has done so much, and can I apply that lesson to other parts of my life and trust that God is doing as much in other parts of my life too? Can I trust that I can work hard and rest, and good things, and even better things, will happen because I'll be working with creation rather than against it? Can I trust, can we trust that rest is just as important as the work? Can we let go of our worry, our fears, and surrender to this rhythm, and the grace that makes it possible? Might I become a dangerous person? Might we become dangerous people, who are deepening our trust in grace and finding rest for our souls that is healing us and everything we touch from the inside out? It's worth a try. Amen.