

A-Trinity Sunday, 2008
St. Luke's, Renton
Kevin Pearson, Preacher

Genesis 1.1-2.4

"And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done .. God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."

Welcome to the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath. For Jews the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday evening and runs through Saturday evening. Christians continued that practice, but early on shifted the Sabbath to Sunday. The Sabbath is to be a day of return and rest, a day to celebrate life as creatures and co-creators with God.

It's curious. In the 10 commandments, right up there with "You shall not commit murder" and "Honor your father and your mother," is the admonition to "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy". In fact, it even comes *before* "don't murder" and "honor you mother!" What's that about? How often in our modern, 7-day work weeks, Saturday and Sunday morning soccer, and given everything else in all creation we are expected to do, how often do you hear the voice of one imploring you to rest, relax, reflect, enjoy life, play, and celebrate? Well hear it today! But don't hear it as something else to do on top of everything else you have to do. "Oh, and by the way, in addition to working 80 hours, get some rest." The Sabbath is not one more thing to *do*. Sabbath encourages a quality of *being*. Hear it as an invitation to discern when you've done enough and can make time to be at rest.

Sometimes our days off and our leisure activities are more strenuous and stressful than our work-weeks. After a vacation, some of us look forward to returning to work for a break. In the push to be productive, Sabbath time might be considered a waste of time. So waste some time! When was the last time you lay in the grass staring up at the sky? When was the last time you sat with a friend and whiled away an afternoon drinking tea or looking at the sea? When was the last time you spent even a half hour of silence, simply listening ... opening your heart to God?

The creation story in Genesis 1 is often read as if God worked for six days creating the world and every living thing and then on the seventh day was exhausted, cracked open his favorite beverage, put his feet up and rested. But ancient rabbis tell the story differently. They say that on the seventh day, God finished creation by creating *menuha* translated as tranquility, serenity, peace, repose. The idea is that, until the Sabbath was created, creation was unfinished. Only after the birth of tranquility was creation complete. The Sabbath is not a break tacked onto a busy life, but a practice bringing serenity, order, and balance to the whole of creation. The land, itself, Leviticus teaches, is to observe a Sabbath break. The seventh year, fields are to lie fallow, letting the soil be renewed and replenished with nutrients.

The Jewish tradition not only saw the sanctity in all creation--that it was very good--but saw and observed the sanctity in time and seasons and rhythms of the world. Perhaps that is why we are so clearly commanded to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. Because when we fail to keep Sabbath, life itself falls apart, we become something other than what God had in mind, and the intricate balance of creation is dishonored.

Sabbath, so it would seem, is the very heart of the spiritual life. Sabbath is the spiritual glue that holds all of life together. For Christians, the Sabbath is a day of resurrection, a little Easter, on



which we are renewed, re-created, reminded that we are made alive in Christ. It is not just a day off, but a day that brings wholeness, completeness, fullness to all of life.

We find ourselves as a human community increasingly out of sync with the natural world. Why even the Bush Administration now says what has become blatantly obvious, that climate change is causing polar ice caps to melting affecting planetary life. (Not that anything should be done about it!) What might a Sabbath conscious bring?

We are increasingly at odds with one another as a community of nations. What might Sabbath say?

If your life is like my life (and I hear from many of you about this), there's no time for anything more in our busy lives. We might even say that our lives are over-filled to a point where our busyness becomes a kind of violence to ourselves. What might we learn from the Sabbath?

It's no stretch to see that Sabbath time, reflection and nourishing rest, can bring healing. The invitation to remember the Sabbath—to reconnect and reorient our lives and relationships in the human and non-human family—the invitation to remember the Sabbath may be our salvation. Sabbath may be the good news I've been yearning to hear in my own life and for the life of the world.

And what if the invitation to Sabbath was at the heart of our calling and was truly the main thing we do here in this place? Church is a wonderful vehicle through which to offer our gifts and to grow as a people formed by grace, but our Sabbath day should never feel like a day of chores or doing one more thing. In fact, it should be the "anti-one more thing". This is the place to return and rest. This is the place to be put in mind of the fact that we are not at the center of the world and where we can be refreshingly reoriented by our common praise of God who is the center of our life. This is the place to be held in community and to celebrate life, celebrate God's graciousness and mercy. And if we keep our discipline of returning and resting, we may well see some spaciousness return to our perspectives and to all of life.

It's pretty clear that God placed a party, a celebration at the center of our lives where we are all invited to return and taste the richness of life and through which life would be complete. So let us remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Come let us celebrate the feast. Alleluia.