

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – August 21, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 13:10-17

For Reflection

Sab-bath

A day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jews from Friday evening to Saturday evening, and by most Christians on Sunday.

The origin of the Hebrew sabbat [t'B;v] is uncertain, but it seems to have derived from the verb sabat, meaning to stop, to cease, or to keep. Its theological meaning is rooted in God's rest following the six days of creation (Gen 2:2-3).

- multiple sources

**Apprehend God in all things,
for God is in all things.
Every single creature is full of God
and is a book about God.
Every creature is a word of God.
If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—
even a caterpillar—
I would never have to prepare a sermon.
So full of God is every creature.**

- Meister Eckhart "God in All Things"

Sabbath: A Paradigm Shift

One morning at South Bay Christian Church (on PCH two blocks from the beach) the office manager (Karen), a homeless friend (Kristen) and I were chatting about where we might hold a church retreat. Karen and I were going on about how restful and beautiful nature is and that we might retreat in the great outdoors.

Kristen listened for a while and then piped up. "You know – the best retreat for me is getting to spend time indoors." Bam. Changed our perspective. This is a woman who wrote poems with titles like "Why homeless people don't wear white" – a woman who lived in a retired hearse and had a degree in gemology. She was good at offering paradigm shifts to the rest of us.

Today's text brought Kristen to mind – as Jesus and the religious leaders of his time argued about the meanings of the commandment to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. Jesus heals a woman with a long-time disability (perceived as possession

by an evil spirit) and is criticized for violating the holy day by doing actual work. He points out that even the rabbis agree that the needs of animals must be tended to on the Sabbath – so certainly a woman is at least equivalent to livestock in the needs hierarchy.

This conversation also raises the larger question of religious literalism and ancient laws that – even back then – burden rather than enhance life. The origin of this particular law derives from Genesis where G-d creates all-that-is in a metaphorical six days and rests from all that labor on the metaphorical seventh. The actual law is in Exodus and then Deuteronomy as one of the ten commandments.

And its original intent is compassionate. It creates a day of rest for slaves and animals and children and adult humans – specifically for all genders. G-d practiced self-compassion and rested. Therefore, we humans are allowed to care for each other and ourselves by resting. It is part of the “natural order” of things – not an imposition by the Sabbath Gestapo.

Therefore, Sabbath is not intended to deny any creature food, water or medical intervention – a point finally realized by Jesus’ red-faced fellow scholars. It is a time for mindfulness – and restoration for the work that will always be unfinished.

And that is something that we sometimes forget in our life as a church. For how many centuries have we turned the Sabbath into a day of taking care of delayed maintenance on church buildings? For how many centuries have we used our day of rest to remind people of their responsibilities – morally, ethically, politically, socially? How many times have we baked and cooked our butts off to contribute to the potluck or the reception? How many of us have been burned out, worn out and forced to run away from church leadership, committee work, special projects and programs?

Church has become, in many ways, an extension of our work week – feeding the impulse and anxiety related to “getting things done” – “making things right” – performing up to standards – saving the world and our children – stemming the tide of chaos and entropy that promises to win in the end.

The UCC in Redlands took umbrage at this and addressed it in a unique way. At the end of every year each person filled out a questionnaire. It asked about the person’s spiritual journey – where they have grown, where they have questions or challenges. It asked about their lives and needs and hopes and accomplishments. It asked about their experiences at the church – and if they wished to enter into or continue in church leadership. It gave the option of taking the year off – from leadership or even from the church itself – sort of a jubilee year of rest (like leaving the field fallow) to restore and reflect how best to relate to the church. Every year

they had the option to pledge or not to pledge – give more or less of their time and resources.

And one of the choices was to re-declare membership – or resign as a member – temporarily or long-term. So every January the church began the year with 0 members. And the membership numbers that went into the national directory in February were based on the return of these questionnaires.

Now THAT is a Beloved Community trusting in G-d – and in the wisdom of every person's soul – in a very real way. It's a paradigm shift – away from gauging success by numbers of members – toward caring about each person's well-being and spiritual condition.

I'm thinking of raising this with leadership as an option for us – and wonder what you think? Is this something you would be willing to try?

Returning to my latest favorite metaphor: Church as Base Camp...

One of the things I love about the idea of base camp is that it is restorative place – temporary yet necessary. It is a place of Sabbath from the grueling challenges of attaining the peak or reaching the canyon floor. It is a place of retreat where we care about each other's well-being and hear about each other's adventures and challenges.

Would you take a moment to talk with someone near you about your favorite experiences of rest and retreat?

Where did you go or stay?

Was it inside or outside?

What did you do or not do?

Was there a spiritual effect? Physical/emotional benefit?

Did it continue to affect you once you were back in the default world?

Are there ways we can have that same experience here at Mt. Hollywood UCC base camp?

Are there changes we need to make in order to find holy rest and restoration here?

Think about it, talk about it... and let me know...

I'm all for it!



Luke 13:10-17

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.