

January 10, 2016

God of Rest

Musical Prelude

Greeting: A Blessing for One Who is Exhausted, John O'Donohue

First Hymn: Dark of Winter, Green 40

*Readings: Genesis 2:2, Exodus 20:8, Matthew 11:28-30, Walter Brueggeman,
Sabbath as Resistance*

Second Hymn: 'Mid All the Traffic of the Ways, Green 142

Joys and Concerns

Musical Interlude

Prayer: God of Rest, still us.

Third Hymn: All Through the Night, Green 213

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Musical Postlude

Greeting

Adaptation of A Blessing for One Who is Exhausted, by John O'Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic, when time takes on the strain until it breaks...

...when weariness invades your spirit,
when gravity begins falling inside you, dragging down every bone,
and you cannot push yourself back to life, you have been forced to enter empty
time.

There is nothing else to do now but rest, and patiently learn to receive the self you
have forsaken for the race of days.

You have traveled too fast over false ground; now your soul has come to take you
back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up to all the small miracles you rushed through.
Become inclined to watch the way of rain and snow when it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,

Taking time to draw alongside the silence of stone until its calmness can claim
you.

Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,

having learned a new respect for your heart, and the joy that dwells far within slow
time.

First Hymn: Dark of Winter, Green 40

Readings

Walter Brueggeman, excerpts from Sabbath as Resistance -- Sabbath is a decisive, concrete, visible way of opting for and aligning with the God of rest. It is the cornerstone of faithful freedom, It is anything but passive. It is an act of resistance. It declares in bodily ways that we will not participate in the anxiety system that pervades our social environment. We will not be defined by busyness and by acquisitiveness and by pursuit of more, in either economics or personal relationships or anywhere else in our lives. Because our lives do not consist in commodity. The Sabbath rest of God is the acknowledgment that God and God's people in the world are not commodities to be dispatched for endless production and so dispatched,...as "hands" in the service of a command economy. Rather they are subjects situated in an economy of neighborliness. All of that is implicit in the reality and exhibit of divine rest.

Genesis 2:2

²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested.

Exodus 20:8

⁸Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

²⁹ **Matthew 11:28** Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Second Hymn: Mid All the Traffic of the Ways, Green 142

Prayer:

God of Stillness, God of Rest, still us. Without even realizing it, we forsake you for the race of days. We travel too fast to notice the small miracles as we rush past. And so we are here to stop. to offer our presence. to be in your presence. to simply be. to come home. home to your calm, to the stillness and silence. At last there is nothing else to do, but wait. Wait upon your still, small voice. Please take the burdens we carry, with such gratitude and relief we lay them down before you, O God of Rest. O One Who Rests With Us. Let us Rest Now, in You.

Third Hymn: All Through the Night, Green 213

Message, Silent Worship

Fourth Hymn: Turn, Turn, Turn, Blue 28

Message

In the years before he died, my Grandpa Kozloski struggled with his declining physical abilities. I remember having a conversation with him in which he said, "I'm not worth much anymore." That was a sorrowful thing to hear him say. At the time I tried to express to him that his worth to me, as my grandpa, and as a person, was not attached to his physical abilities or even his mental capacities, that he was simply my grandpa, that he was worth something in his essence even if he never moved from his chair, and if he was slowing down, his faculties receding, it was because it was his turn to rest, his time for resting, and it was our honor to take care of him and be with him, regardless of what he could or could not do. What I didn't say then, but wish I had, because I think he might have heard and understood it as the devout Catholic that he was his whole life, is that maybe he had entered his life's Sabbath time. That maybe there is a season for everything,

and maybe that was his Sabbath season. Maybe not being able to “do” much was the work he was doing. And, God knows, that’s hard work.

The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew meaning to stop, to cease, to rest. The instruction to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy appears in the Ten Commandments, the Laws given, so the story goes, to Moses, on Mount Sinai. Walter Brueggeman, in his book *Sabbath as Resistance*, from which I shared a short excerpt, contends that the narrative structure of the 10 commandments contrasts with what the Hebrew people experienced in the Law of Pharaoh, when they were enslaved in Egypt. The economy of the Pharaoh was relentless and violent, absorbing all levels of social power, commodifying everyone and everything into a grind of endless production that demanded all benefit flow upward to the one deified man at the top. The value of the Hebrew slaves in captivity was determined by how much they could be made to do. But on Mount Sinai, the story says, From pillars of smoke and fire, God gives Israel a different law. From what is primordial, elemental and uncontrollable comes the testimony that something other than the laws of human power, privilege, and violent coercion will form the basis of this community. Instead, in the 10 Commandments they will have a mandate, a charge to transform relationship -- relationship with what is Holy, and relationship with one another. The first three of the 10 commandments deal with covenant relationship, with faithfulness to God. The last six address relationships with other people, and the 4th, the one that bridges relationship to God and relationship to other people, is the one about the Sabbath. Between God and our neighbor, there is Sabbath. There is Rest.

I think a lot about rest, maybe more than the average person, because, as I have confessed before to you, several times, I struggle with chronic insomnia. I am not the only one who does -- one study suggests that fully a third of American adults are chronically sleep deprived. However, one of the things that uneasy sleep has given me is a great appreciation for rest. And I think that Letting go into sleep as well as letting go of being able to get to Sleep can both be a kind of daily Sabbath ritual. Sleep -- that weightless, absolute, full and complete rest -- requires surrender and vulnerability, an unguarded-ness that is not unlike faith before God, faith that when I fall to sleep, I am safe, I am held. Held by that Essential Holiness of the Book of Genesis, The One Who, in the Beginning, Rests. On the other hand,

Learning how to rest when sleep is elusive calls for the intention to remain calm, attention to my breath, surrender to what can't be controlled, and courage in the lonely dark that is utterly like prayer. I have by no means mastered this, but luckily I get to practice every night.

My point is that I have begun to see that how we rest is part of how we relate to the Sacred. How we rest is one way we encounter what we call Holy. It is how we discover what is always there, what lives in the silence and emptiness we inhabit when we simply stop. I love the gentle call to rest that runs through the Bible. The psalms are full of the sense that God is the place of Rest, the One Who Gives us rest, who makes us lie down beside still waters. In the very beginning, the Deity stops to simply rest. In Exodus there is the basic commandment: Thou Shalt Rest. And finally the words attributed to Jesus in Matthew: come to me you who are weary, Lay down your burdens and I will give you rest. Brueggeman says that those words are also part of a narrative structure similar to the commandments, intending to contrast a way of seeing human lives as primarily economic units, entities of endless desire, productivity, and restlessness, with an understanding that we belong to God, and that we do not need to do anything to earn that grace-filled rest.

I think of winter as the Sabbath season. In the last week, winter finally arrived here. I've read the articles about El Nino, about how the majority of climate scientists agree that single weather events and phenomena like the El Nino cycle that is causing a mild winter here are anecdotal evidence and can't be interpreted to prove climate change, but, at the same time, the El Nino cycle and single weather events can be expected to become more severe, extreme, and unpredictable as global climate change accelerates. So we can't prove ecological imbalance by citing the warmest November and December on record. And yes, I know it made things easier, the ease of travel for Christmas gatherings, and less work and money and resources to heat our houses. But despite it's not scientifically proving anything is amiss, despite the positives of balmy temperatures, I found myself very ill at ease in the non-winter. I felt Nervous. I felt like I should pick back up that outside yardwork and gardening to do list that I gently lay down in the fall and blissfully let lie until spring. I felt like I should have continued gardening, doing stuff, getting stuff done.

Year round home grown veggies would be great, except to be honest I don't want to garden all year long. I want a rest. I want a Sabbath season in the year. A Sabbath season for Earth and heart. I've always loved how the words earth and heart consist of the same letters in different combinations. And I've always loved how in this part of the world, it feels like the earth's heart is given over to rest in winter. Body and Soul, soil and human, plant and animal -- all rest, all stop, this time of year in our part of the world. Trees and plants go dormant, garlic bulbs and seeds sleep in the dark soil, animals hibernate, or burrow deep. The nights stretch out long and luxurious. It's like we are part of an ancient rhythm, a heartbeat across the whole planet -- and in fact we are. It's called the yearly biosphere cycle. On the ceaseless, sleepless internet, there is a NASA simulation that shows the surface of the earth shifting from the green of the spring and summer to the white of winter, from pole to pole, like a wave over the whole earth, and back again, in a rhythm that is like breathing, or a heartbeat, systole and diastole, pulse and relax, growth and rest.

My son Cazimer, who just turned five, is a child of our sleeplessly digital age. Despite our fairly deliberate attempts to limit screen time and the influence of technological devices in our children's lives, nevertheless, the vocabulary of technology has permeated his consciousness, in a way that it certainly didn't when I was his age, a generation ago. When I was growing up, Our household didn't have a VCR until I was in middle school. But Caz has grown up with videos and movies, and youtube. One way this plays out is that when we are reading a book, or playing a board game, or doing something that is not interfacing with screen technology, if Caz needs to take a break for a moment, he will say, "Mommy, pause. Press pause." And then he will run to the bathroom, or go get a drink, and there is a momentary stop, a Sabbath moment. As ambivalent as I am about the vocabulary of technology being hard-wired into my little guy's brain, I love the idea of pressing pause.

The New Year brings with it a cultural tradition of setting goals and making resolutions, and this year, I wonder if among the goals we set, we could also resolve to rest, to press pause more often. Commit to pause. Schedule more nothing. And Rest into a Sabbath moment, a Sabbath day, a Sabbath season.

Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Benediction

Adaptation from May Sarton: "Now Voyager"

Now voyager, lay here your dazzled head.
Come back to earth, be nourished,

Here close to earth be cherished, mortal heart,
Hold your way deep as roots in winter.

Where music thundered let the mind be still, Where the will triumphed let there be
no will, What light revealed, now let the dark fulfill.

Here close to earth the deeper pulse is stirred, only heart-beat upon beat is heard.

Here let the burden be calmed and stilled, and the long yearning of heart fulfilled.

Now voyager, come home, come home to rest, Here on the long-lost country of
earth's breast. Lay down your burden, and be blest, be blest.