



OUR DAILY BREAD
Resources for Spiritual Questers

Remember to Sabbath

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*A sermon delivered on May 27, 2018 at the New Jerusalem Church (Swedenborgian)
in Pretty Prairie, KS*



June 2017

When you ask someone how they are, we often hear, “I’m so busy.” And when I am asked, “how are you doing?” My first inclination is to answer, “Good, and busy”. It is like a medal of honor to be “busy”. We are pushed by a culture that equates busyness with purpose and success. And as Swedenborgians we put “being of use” right at the top of our to do list.

The name of my message for today is not a mistake, “Remember to Sabbath.” The word Sabbath is normally thought of as a noun, referring to a certain day of the week. The seventh day was when God rested from creating all of creation. For Jews this is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. For Christians Sabbath is Sunday, the first day of the week, when Jesus Christ rose from the grave.

Sabbath actually comes from the Hebrew verb *Shabat*, which means to rest. The root of the word Sabbath comes from the root word *Shub* which means to return to a mental or spiritual state, away from business and towards the Lord. It also relates to restoration. All of these connections help to expand what we often think of when we list the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.”

Remember to sabbath, to rest. Not necessarily keeping a certain day holy, but to recognize the holiness of rest and restoration. It is not about the old legalistic ritual to keep Sunday holy. In today’s world it is about finding time in our lives to be holy, to rest, to care for our bodies and souls, to remember to Sabbath.

I thought it would be good to talk about this today as we are heading into summer, when we often are busiest. The days are longer. There is so much going on in our lives. Kids are out of school. Vacations are planned. The yard and garden call us. Summer is a time of activity and often we forget to rest. At Pretty Prairie we don’t even have worship services in summer to remind us to pause, relax and lift-up our hearts to remember God. We sometimes forget our holy connections and miss the joy of rest. (Pretty Prairie does have Bible study all summer).

Our scriptures relate many stories of the need for rest. When Moses becomes weary as he led the Israelites through the desert, God said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Jesus tells his disciples, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will

give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

And as Jesus invited his disciples, he invites us, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”*

Intrinsically we know we need rest but knowing is not necessarily doing. How many things I know I should do, but don’t. This message is as much for me as each one of you. We have to make Sabbath happen, or our bodies might just make it for us.

First, stop. Sabbath can only happen if we shut off the computer, our phone, the TV, ignore the laundry and withdraw from the worldly things that entice and control us. It doesn’t have to be a full day. Start with an hour, or a morning, and surrender to a time when you will not be disturbed, tempted or responsive to technology and work left undone.

When we stop, we see that the world continues without us. We need this sometimes – gentle humility. We do not have to keep pushing ourselves and others. We can get trapped with an artificial urgency that we must keep going and doing. When we stop, we let our minds rest, our bodies heal, our spirits are restored. As the Psalmist invites us, “*Be still, and know.*”*

Etty Hillesum, in the diary she kept while in a Nazi concentration camp, writes:

“We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies.... The things that have to be done must be done, and for the rest we must not allow ourselves to become infested with thoughts and of petty fears and worries, so many motions of no confidence in God. Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.”¹

And surrender. In Exodus, we read, “In six days God made heaven and earth and on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed.” The word, ‘refreshed’ literally means, and *God exhaled*. The creation occurs with the inhale and the Sabbath is the exhale. Without exhaling, the life-giving,

¹ Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum, 1941-43*. London: Persephone Books, 1999.

creative force of inhaling is impossible. Ancient rabbis teach on the seventh day, God created *menuha* – tranquility, serenity, peace and repose – rest, in the deepest sense, healing stillness. Until the Sabbath, the birth of blessed rest, the circle of creation was not complete.

Savor little bits of Sabbath. While we often think we need a day of rest, many of us find it hard to find a full day, or even a half day. First we must experience the value of a bit of Sabbath. A book that I have talked about before is “Seven Sacred Pauses”². The goal is to find something regular in your life that reminds you to exhale and experience the Divine in the midst of your busy day. Some use the hours of the day: first thing in the morning, mid-morning, noon, mid-afternoon, dinner, evening and night time. The practice is to stop and look out the window, or pause in your cubicle and think a good thought, or just breathe in a full breath and exhale slowly three times. Anything that breaks the routine of a busy day and reminds you that God loves you and all manner of things shall be well. I put quotes above my computer. Right now I have one from Simone Weil, “In everything which gives us the pure authentic feeling of beauty there really is the presence of God.”²

I want to share an ancient practice that you can use this summer to enter into Sabbath rest. Some of you may know it, and that is good, this will just be a reminder. It is *Lectio Divina*, or contemplative reading, and it is common in most religions. I find it feeds my soul.

It begins with reading a short passage of scripture or other inspirational writing and then quietly reflecting on it. It is not analyzing or concentrating on the meaning, but rather allowing it to speak to your heart. It is to be done slowly, contemplatively, letting God speak to you through the words to touch you and heal you.

I have given you one to start with, the 23rd Psalm. It is best to read it out loud, if you can, or in silence is OK, too. Read it a few times and then notice what phrase or word stands out to you. Then sit quietly or take a walk, and allow the words to be in you. When your mind wanders, come back to the phrase, without judgement or searching for meaning or answers. Just let it be with you.

(continued on next page)

² Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. transl. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, Routledge: 2002, 150.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.*

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**Wiederkehr, Macrina. *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.