

Sabbath

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I've been thinking a lot about Sabbath because our current world of COVID is reminding me of its importance. COVID has changed the rhythm and flow of my days. I suspect it has changed yours as well.

The concept of Sabbath first appears in Genesis 2, the second story of creation, when God rests on the seventh day after "finishing" the creation of "heavens and the earth." We hear about Sabbath also in Exodus 16, when God gives the Hebrews bread and meat in the wilderness, food from heaven, and on the sixth day twice as much, so on the Sabbath they will take a break from collecting and cooking the food. Rest and freedom from work are at the core of Sabbath.

Delving deeper into history we discover that Sabbath originally was not associated with a day of the week, but with the monthly celebration of the new moon. The festival was about a change of pace, withdrawal and rest. Eventually adapted by the Hebrews it turned into a weekly observance as well as a sign of their identity. The verb *Sabbath* in Hebrew means *to rest*.

Two things need to happen on the Sabbath: 1. People must rest from work because God did. So rest is holy work. 2. Locals and aliens, women and men, servants and bosses, humans and animals as well as the earth need to take a break. Accordingly, Sabbath is not only about personal rest, but also about social and environmental rest, hence about social and eco-justice.

This need for a break, for rest, for a change of pace, rhythm and flow as well as a day to think of something else besides the "troubles of the day" is real for us

humans, and for all creation. How else would we remember the sacredness of time, the holiness of our days and the One who gifts us with them?

During this time of COVID I find myself needing to make Sabbath happen. Working from home, attending a string of zoom meetings daily, hearing the news and feeling the restlessness it generates, grieving the state of the world, can be overwhelming. Committing to a time of rest and Sabbath becomes a spiritual practice not only as a time of just BEING, but also as a time for God and what is essential, meaningful and Holy.

A day apart, or even an hour, 15 or 30 minutes set apart when one does not deal with work, obligations, emails, and taking a break to breathe and refocus can shift one's attention from the "troubles of the day" to the One who gives meaning to our days. Especially during traumatic times our inner spirit needs special attention. A moment of Sabbath can tend to its nurture through a time of silence and prayer, through letting go and trusting, through acknowledging grace and expressing gratitude, through recognizing the sadness of the times, through stillness and openness of heart to the Spirit and toward the unknown.

During these summer months, as I find myself needing Sabbath in the midst of an unordinary time, aware that Sabbath might be a luxury in an unjust world, I am mindful also of Sabbath for "the least" among us, the land, and the earth our home. I realize that Sabbath is holy rest and holy work. Sabbath is justice work for body and soul, for society and environment, for humanity and all creation.