

Holy God, send Your Word, send Your Spirit, send Your love. Amen.

When we talk about Sabbath-Keeping, we soon come around to the subject of time. Time is a gift, and sometimes a vexation.

Time is infinite and yet somehow always running out.

We think of time as fixed, yet our experience of it can vary wildly – sometimes it flies by and sometimes it seems to crawl.

“Where did the years go?” we wail.

And yet somehow the five minutes it takes to boil an egg seem never to pass.

And sometimes it stands still, as when we’re deeply engaged in something that is taking our whole attention – or we’re with someone we find fascinating.

Attention is the key thing, in fact.

Our experience of time is deeply affected by where we are putting our attention.

What activities cause you to experience time as excruciatingly slow, that make you want to kill time?

What activities make you feel you could never have enough time, that make you want to stop time?

Listen to the verbs we use – kill, stop, manage. They are verbs of control.

When in fact time is among the many things in our lives we cannot really control.

It goes on, with or without us.

We can think of time in terms of our lifespans – from God’s perspective just a blink of an eye – *“For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past”* – or in decades, years, months, weeks.

It can be a good exercise to do a timeline of your life and mark the high and low points, and then with another color pen track your spiritual life through those.

Church-folk are very attuned to the rhythms of the year,

starting with Advent as one year draws to a close;

moving past Christmas into Epiphany as outside the light increases;

into Lent as we prepare to wrap our minds and hearts around the mystery of Easter; the great fifty days of Eastertide culminating in the feast of Pentecost

– and then the long six months of Ordinary Time, the season of Pentecost,

As we move past the holidays and settle into the rhythms of God-Life.

We break half our year into four to eight-week chunks, and then just coast.

Are there “seasons” like that in your own year?

Many of the ways we divide time and measure time are human constructs. Who said there shouldn't be ten months in a year, or twelve days in a week? Where we really live is in the day, which is measured not only by humanly devised hours and minutes, but by the rhythms of the sun and moon, of darkness and light. As much as the church may think annually, our faith invites us to live daily. "Give us today our daily bread," Jesus taught us to pray. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy," the commandments instruct. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own." An addict in recovery knows they can only be sober one day at a time. One of the ways I am navigating these treacherous times we are enduring now is by reminding myself to live in the day, not run days ahead.

We can only ever live in the day we're in,
though we find ourselves stuck in yesterday or tomorrow.
Each day brings blessings and troubles sufficient for itself, often a multitude of both. Which is another reason to cultivate the practice of setting one day apart that looks and feels different from the others, in which we can settle and process the experiences and stresses of the other six days, in which we can rest. I experience time so differently when I take a real sabbath – it goes very slowly, whereas my ordinary days are completely ordered by the clock, and time flies. Sometimes we're afraid to be still and bored, but it gives our spirits, our minds, our psyches time to digest. And then we're readier to reengage the busyness.

This time to process may be the most important time of all. Just as our digestive system suffers when we don't take the time to allow our bodies to digest a meal, our minds and hearts suffer when we don't process our experiences, our feelings, our interactions. That is in part what the brain is doing in our dreams, sorting, processing the material of our daytime lives. So when we work all day every day, we are not allowing ourselves to digest. And when we cheat our sleep, we are not giving time for that essential function.

Dreams are a big clue to the way God designed time for us. We think of nighttime as the end of the day and sunrise as the beginning of the new one – but many cultures, including the one in which Jesus grew up, saw the day as really beginning at sundown, in that liminal space dusk brings. Our Lenten study group is exploring a book called *Receiving the Day*, by Dorothy Bass. She writes about re-ordering our sense of when the day truly begins. In the story of creation in Genesis each "day" begins at dusk.

The Jewish Sabbath begins at dusk. In Ramadan, Muslims break fast at sundown. What if we could shift our perception to seeing our days as beginning at sundown? Bass quotes Eugene Peterson, pastor and theologian who did *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible. *“Perceiving the day’s beginning at the darkening point teaches us something important about who we are as human beings, he says. “The Hebrew evening/morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace. We go to sleep and God begins his work.”*

Bass goes on to say, *“The first part of the day passes in darkness, then, but not in inactivity. God is out growing the crops even before the farmer is up and knitting together the wound before the clinic opens. When farmer and physician awake, they will join in, contributing mightily, but only because grace came first. Likewise, God has been working on and in them, body and mind, while they slept; yesterday’s bruises and slights have begun to heal. Entered this way, morning is new, worth being grateful for even before we have put our human touches on it.”*¹

See how that shifts our sense of responsibility and burden and brings us into today? Recognizing that during the first six to eight hours of our day others are working, God is working, we are not in charge? Our work is to rest until daylight? What if we saw Night Prayers as prayers of preparation for the new day, not commentary on the one just past?

Our new life, eternal life; the eighth day, Easter Day, began in the dark of night, when after the Sabbath ended at sundown, three of Jesus’s friends went to his tomb to prepare his body properly, as he died too close to the sundown on the Passover Sabbath for them to do the work then.

When they discovered that tomb empty, his body gone – and an angel telling them he was risen from the dead; when his followers then began to encounter him risen from the dead, they knew God had overturned time as we know it. All was new.

Bass writes that early Christians “called the first day of the week the eighth day. *On the very first first day, God began the creation of the heavens and the earth. Christ’s rising on another first day, centuries later, meant that God was beginning a new creation. The future was already breaking into the present, their experience testified; the healing for which all creation yearns was near enough to touch. The seven-day week could not hold the fullness of this time, and so the first day, which*

¹ *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, Dorothy C. Bass, p 18 (2000 John Wiley & Sons.)

embraced eternity as well as its own twenty-four hours, spilled over. The first day therefore, was also the eighth.”²

We are living in the eighth day, my friends,
a day that can only be lived one day at a time.
God has sanctified time for us – we need not be enchained by it.
This is the day that the Lord has made – let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Amen.

THE GOSPEL

Matthew 11:28-30; 12:1-8

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?’

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’

² *Ibid*, p 55 (2000 John Wiley & Sons.)