

God is Still Speaking through Sabbath

Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11

Center Church, Hartford

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Taylor Swift has a new song out which addresses people who shout in hate, specifically at the LGBTQ community and women, telling the haters in the repeated chorus, "You need to calm down. You're being too loud. You need to just stop."

The first time I heard this I thought it was the tritest thing I had ever heard. Really? To think that telling people who hate gay folk and who think women are "less than" to just calm down and be quiet is any kind of a solution? I don't think so. They don't just need to calm down; they need to listen and learn and open themselves to love instead of hate. They need to leave people alone.

And we can broaden that to people who hate for any reason, and pick up guns and kill children and parents and sisters and grandfathers. They don't just need to calm down. They need to put the weapons down and undo the hate that drives them. And the people who are fueling that hate don't need to just calm down and be less loud; they need to shut up altogether and think about the impact of their words. So, Ms. Swift, thanks for the thoughts, but I don't think you go quite far enough in your song.

Which, after all, is just a pop song.

Now, you know there is a "however" coming. However, she is on the right track toward something so ancient, the single most ignored and demeaned gift of God. *Sabbath* is what it is called in our tradition. Shabbat to the Jews. Muslims observe Jumu'ah on Friday. Other religions also have times of rest and contemplation built into their practices. We have a common understanding that human beings need to just stop on a regular basis. Our bodies need rest. Our minds and spirits need a chance to intentionally reconnect with God, and to have processing time to sort out our lives. We NEED this, and we know it, and so often, we ignore it because we live in a place and time where activity is rewarded and required, and sabbath rest, which is different from sleep, is not.

God created and then, God rested. We are told God blessed a sabbath time and made it holy. Then -- gave us the gift of sabbath; a day without work, not only for us but for everyone in the community, including the people that do the servant work, including those who are strangers and foreigners, even including the domestic animals! Hear that this is meant as a gift, not a restriction; a blessing and not a punishment. God calls us to a communal break to refresh bodies, minds, and spirits. It's not a punishment "time out." It's a renewing rest.

I don't want to just call those few of us gathered here to remember and observe sabbath in our lives; I want to call our entire nation to a day of Sabbath. As Ms. Swift sings, "We need to just stop."

We need to stop the politicians yelling at each other. We need to stop the tweeting of anger and hate. We need to stop the constant work of what we label the "working class," as though their whole being is defined by constant work with little reward, like those who work in Amazon warehouses who run from one end of the room to another without time for bathroom breaks for

hours, and those who often need to work 2 or 3 jobs just to feed their families. In a society as wealthy as this one, that is just wrong. Some of us need to stop the need to be available to work 24/7 because of the devices we carry everywhere. We need to stop the constant flow of social media information and dis-information.

We need to just stop.

What did we learn as children about crossing the street? "Stop, look and listen." This is the gift of Sabbath.

Stop. Everything. For a few minutes, an hour on Sunday here, maybe a whole day. Stop being useful. Stop entertainment. Stop activity, especially activity that is hurtful or not life-giving and loving, to yourself or other. Stop talking, or texting or typing. Stop.

Look. When was the last time you sat and looked around you inside or outside your home? At people who may live with you, really look at them? At the creation God labored so hard over? At the joy and the pain and the utter beauty of the world? Look.

Listen. Not so much to yourself, and not listening with an ear to formulating your next comment. Listen to the others around you and especially to those you may make into "other." Listen to the sounds of the earth. Listen, most of all, for God still speaking to you. Perhaps in the words of scripture or in what you see and hear around you. But mostly in silence, let God have time to move in your mind to help you, to comfort you, to challenge you, to create in and through you.

In a few moments, we are going to practice this as we receive Holy Communion. Most of the celebration of the sacrament today will be in silence, and slow and deliberate. Holy Communion is not meant to be fast food. Remember Jesus was a Jew, and this small meal is like what Jews call Tikkun Olam; a time to repair the world, starting with you, with us.

We don't need something new to repair the world. We need to reclaim something old. Sabbath is a gift that can keep on giving, if we but remember to let it. Friends, remember the Sabbath. Even for a few hours. Keep time for holiness in your life somewhere. It is a gift. Amen.