

1st Sunday of Advent • C
Christ the King • November 28-29, 2009

In the relentless busyness of modern life, again we enter the season of Advent, the season of waiting and preparing. Advent is an invitation to remember the rhythm between work and rest.

All life requires a rhythm. There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body's need for sleep. There is a rhythm in the way day dissolves into night, and night into morning. There is a rhythm in the growth of spring and summer and the quieted necessity of the dormancy of fall and winter. In our bodies, the heart perceptibly rests after each life-giving beat; the lungs rest between the exhale and the inhale.

We have lost this essential rhythm. Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something—anything— is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet these ever growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss that compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us relief.

In our drive for success we are seduced by the promise of more: more money, more recognition, more satisfaction, more love, more information, more influence, more possessions, more security. Even when our intentions are noble and our efforts sincere, the corrosive pressure of frantic over activity can cause suffering in others and ourselves.

This can be seen in the standard greeting everywhere: ***I am so busy.*** And often we wear this badge of being busy with no small degree of pride. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves, and we hope to others. To be unavailable to our friends and our family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even to know that the sun has set at all), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single, mindful breath, has become the model of success.

How have we allowed this to happen? This was not our intention. Maybe it is because of have forgotten the Sabbath.

This may seem simplistic or naïve. Sabbath can be a single day of the week, but it can also be something more far-reaching and revolutionary. Sabbath time is effortless and nourishing rest. It is consecrated time to listen to be still and know God, to remember the root of inner wisdom and peace, to remember where we are most deeply nourished, to remember and see who we really are called to be. This Sabbath time, or sacred rest, may be a holy day, the seventh day of the week as in the Jewish tradition, or the first day of the week, as for Christians. But this time can be an afternoon, an hour, a walk. It can indeed be anytime that gives nourishment and rest.

Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just about a day off. It is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to be still and listen to what is more deeply beautiful, nourishing and true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring the grace and spirit that sustain and heal us.

The authority of Sabbath time gives us permission to let go of any shame or guilt that we have come to associate with taking time to rest. Sabbath gives us permission, it invites us to stop.

Sabbath doesn't require us to leave home, change jobs, go on retreat, or leave the world of ordinary life. We don't even have to change clothes or purchase any expensive spiritual equipment. We only need to remember.

I suggest that Advent is Sabbath time. An Advent Sabbath can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments. An Advent Sabbath is a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity.

An Advent Sabbath is a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. "Remember the Sabbath" means "Remember that everything you have received is a blessing. Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your labor. Remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it."

An Advent Sabbath honors the necessary wisdom of dormancy. This period of rest—in which nutrition and fertility most readily coalesce—is a spiritual and biological necessity. We need a period in which we lie fallow, and restore our souls.

So, let us practice here at church. In this time let us remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred; we light candles, sing songs, tell stories, eat and rest. It is time to let our work, our hands, our minds lie fallow to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time. Let us breath deeply in the rhythm of redeeming grace.

Let me also give you a suggestion to practice at home. Choose at least one heavily used appliance or device—the telephone, television, computer, washer and dryer—and let them rest for a Sabbath period. Whether it is a morning, afternoon, or entire day, surrender to a quality of time when you will not be disturbed, seduced, or responsive to what our technologies have to offer. Notice how you respond to its absence.

Advent is a time to remember and rest. Advent is a time to be still and know our God.

Based upon *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, by Wayne Muller. © 1999. Published by Bantam Books.