



March 2017 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

Reflections on a Sabbatical Leave - Celebrating the Gift

“Sabbath is an invitation to image our life differently.”

Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Imagination, Walter Brueggemann

Prologue

The Sabbath pattern - six days of work, followed by one of rest - is woven deep into the fabric of the Bible - it is seen, fundamentally, as a gift! The root word means to cease, to desist. The idea is not that of relaxation or refreshment, but cessation from activity. The first story of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures climaxes on the seventh day, the first time there was a seventh day. Having created everything, God rests, and blesses this day, and makes it holy.

Later, God teaches the people of Israel to share in the blessing of this day (Exodus 16). After bringing them out of Egyptian slavery into the wilderness, God sends them manna, commanding them to gather enough each morning for that day's food alone. Mistrusting, they gather more than they need, but it rots. On the sixth day, however, they are told to gather enough to last for two days. Miraculously, the extra does not rot, and those mistrustful ones who go out on the seventh morning to gather more food find none. God is teaching them, through their own hunger, and nature's provisions, to keep the Sabbath even before Moses receives the commandments on Sinai.

When those commandments come, the Sabbath commandment is the longest and, in some ways, the most puzzling. Unlike any of the others, it takes quite different forms in the two passages where the Ten Commandments appear (Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Both versions require the same behavior - work on six days, rest on one - but each gives a different reason. What is wonderful is that each reason (remembering and observing) arises from a fundamental truth about God's relationship to humanity. Together, these two renderings of the Sabbath commandment summarize the most fundamental stories and beliefs of the Scriptures: creation and exodus, humanity in God's image and a people liberated from captivity. In both remembering and observing, the Sabbath is understood to be gift.

The Christian community continued to treasure the Sabbath commandment, along with the other nine commandments from Sinai. They also came to believe that its meaning had changed with the new creation God began with Christ's death and resurrection. The holy day from now on, therefore, was not the seventh but the eighth, the day on which the future burst into the present.

Reflections on the Sabbatical Leave

Reflections about Larry

Walter Brueggemann makes the wonderful statement that, "Sabbath is an invitation to image our life differently" (*Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Imagination*). Much of my time in journal writing, reflecting and praying, centered around this imaging.

As I began the Sabbatical I realized immediately just how tired I really was.

While re-reading Brueggemann's book I came across the following words which affirmed not only my exhaustion but the life-giving gift that the Sabbatical was for me. "A startling theological claim is made for the Sabbath as God's day of rest in Exodus 31:17: '...The Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.' The text uses the verb *nap hash* in the reflexive, suggesting that Yahweh was exhausted, diminished, and the Sabbath made it possible for God to receive life back."

Henri Nouwen's words spoke into this weariness and this gift of Sabbatical, too: "While realizing that ten years ago, I didn't have the faintest idea that I would end up where I now am, I still like to keep up the illusion that I am in control of my own life. I like to decide what I most need, what I will do next, what I want to accomplish, and how others will think of me. While being so busy running my own life, I become oblivious to the gentle movements of the Spirit of God within me, pointing me in directions quite different from my own.

It requires a lot of inner solitude and silence to become aware of these divine movements. God does not shout, scream, or push. The Spirit of God is soft and gentle like a small voice or light breeze. It is the spirit of love." (*Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*)

Imagine. The Spirit of God pointing. Growing awareness of these divine movements.

Imagining my life differently means in part that I have reconnected with my most deep friendships, I have re-engaged in exploring the gift of music, and I have intentionally carved out time for days off and holiday.

Reflections about Family

One of the greatest joys in the Sabbatical gift has been quantity time with my family. Cathy and I spent much time together...talking, walking, laughing, remembering...simply being. Time with our children, too, was a gift. They are caring, inquisitive, loving, supporting, encouraging, teasing, gifted young adults. And I am so proud of each of them! On behalf of Cathy, Paul and Kim, Matthew, Anna and Jordan, I thank you for this Sabbatical gift.

The Sabbatical also gifted me with quantity time with my extended family: parents, twin, and two sisters. All offered me, without reservation, the gift of presence, silence, tears and laughter. And I am so thankful.

Reflections about Our Synod

Thank-you to each of you who shared your God given gifts with us all during these past three months! I express particular thanks to The Rev. Dr. Julianne Barlow, Assistant to the Bishop for Mission, who served capably as Commissary; Darla Wildfang, Executive Assistant; Synod Executive – Wayne Street, Marilyn Murray and Stephen Wildfang; and the Deans: The Revs. Trish Schmermund, Eleanor Ness, Kathy Calkins, Kristian Wold and Reg Berg. Thank-you.

We continue to imagine and to grow into our Synod's mission priorities: Spirit-led Leadership, Hope-filled Discipleship, Innovative Tradition and Collaborative Partnerships. We continue to build relationships, to listen and to seek common areas for working together. We continue to hear that:

- You are desiring connection and relationship to experience God's love among us all.
- You are eager to risk and test new ways but are concerned about how to do this, and want to ensure we keep our essentials.
- You want practical help in discerning what God is up to because you sense God is at work and present in so many ways.
- This sense of God's acting presence is creating renewed desire to be communities of God's hope-filled people.

Conclusion

Celebrating the gift of a Sabbatical leave means a deep, deep sense of gratitude and thanksgiving for me: To God for sustaining and upholding me during this time. For insights gained. Imagination rekindled. Sabbatical time in order to receive life back. For deeper listening and deeper discerning of my calling as your Bishop.

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,

+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

***The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13***