

Remember the Sabbath—Keep it Holy  
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry  
Exodus 20: 1-17  
March 7, 2021

May the God...

Good Morning!

It's been a long decade, this year since March 2020; so much trauma, dissension, loss and death. As of Friday, March 5, here in the US, 533,642 people have died from COVID-19. That number equals the populations of Lansing, Ann Arbor, Wyandotte, Lincoln Park, Trenton and Grosse Ile combined.

How do we reckon with this loss?

Do we even have the ability to fathom the holes their lost lives are leaving?  
How do we keep going on?

We don't.

Friends, we have been wandering in this pandemic wilderness for a time now. We need rest, we need strength and we need hope and some creativity before we carry on.

The Israelites of old knew all about the wilderness, wandering, carrying on day by day. Released from slavery in Egypt, but now in the desert, with manna to eat, but what for their souls?

Now, we hear in our scripture, that they have made their way to Mount Sinai. They are to spend the next eleven months at the foot of this Holy Mountain. This time, this period in their lives will shape and form who the Jewish people are called to be for centuries to come.

Biblical theologian, F. Washington Jarvis says that Mount Sinai is the place where mountain top experiences were invented. It is here, after the crashing thunder, quaking earth and blaring trumpets, here at the foot of Mount Sinai that the Israelites receive God's law, the Ten Commandments; A law that is not a burden to bear or cumbersome rules to follow, but rather frameworks, gifts upon which to pattern their lives.

This morning, in the midst of our own enduring sojourn in the COVID-19 wilderness, I find myself inexorably drawn to the commandment instructing them, instructing us to rest.

God calls us to rest, God demands that we rest; God says to the people,

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the lord your God; Do not do any work on it...”

Interestingly enough this is the longest commandment; the commandment with the most explanations. I think that’s because it tells us not to do, but to be. To breathe and to sigh and remember that in the end, God is in charge. The psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God,” (Psalm 46:10)

Although we have countless gifts and talents given to us by God to use to transform our world, we also need to remember that it is NOT ALL up to us.

Dr. W. Gunther Plaut in his book, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* says of the Sabbath: “Its mood is both serene and joyous (mourning practices cease on this day as does fasting)...it is a time for recollecting God’s goodness and acknowledging [God’s] sovereignty; it provides social balm, intellectual expansion and a shutting out of the day’s cares. It is spiritually and physically restorative...” pp 549-550.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says that the Sabbath is an “island of stillness”. He writes, “In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where [a person] may enter a harbor and reclaim [their] dignity. The island is the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of detachment from things, instruments and practical affairs as well as an attachment to the spirit.” (p 58 *I Asked for Wonder.*)

My spouse Susan sent me a link to an article the other day from Inc. Magazine entitled, “Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein and Neuroscience all Agree: Your Daily Routine Needs More ‘Non-time.’” (by Jessica Stillman)

The article points out that some of the most creative people in our world spent significant time, doing nothing. Albert Einstein would sit on his sailboat and just watch the water go by. The article then goes on to explain that when our minds are stressed, when we are feeling overwhelmed, neuroscientists have found that our brains focus on details activating the left hemisphere of our brains and thus preventing us from seeing the bigger picture. To be more creative, we need more “non-time”, quiet, alone, insulated, away from the tasks and stress of the world.

I cannot imagine a time when we have been more stressed and overburdened with the pressures of the world. We are living in a cliché-ridden unprecedented time; a time when scripture from thousands of years ago, offers us a way forward.

In this gut wrenching time, in the bits and pieces, minutes, hours and day that you might be able to find, my prayer is that you and I will both, make Holy the Sabbath. That we will rest for a bit, so that in the midst of the grief and pain, we may be restored and renewed, that in the quiet non time of our lives, we may hear the still small whisper of God, and discover the creativity to face this challenge, the sustenance to carry on and

the soul food to squarely confront, endure and even triumph over the relentless tirade of this pandemic.

Friends, remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy. Amen.