

WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH? SABBATH AS A LIFE PRINCIPLE

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So let's start our Sabbath reflection with some musical memories.

Did you (or do you) listen to Black Sabbath, an English rock band, formed in Birmingham in 1968. Often cited as pioneers of heavy metal music, the group originally formed as a blues rock band; the group soon adopted the Black Sabbath moniker and began incorporating occult themes with horror-inspired lyrics and tuned-down guitars. Despite an association with these two themes, Black Sabbath also composed songs dealing with social instability, political corruption, the dangers of drug abuse and apocalyptic prophecies of the horrors of war.

Personally, the group does not appeal to me musically, but their social critique is intriguing.

Of interest to another generation, and rich with St. Paul's connections, recall with me Tevye and Golde's Sabbath Prayer from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

May the Lord protect and defend you.

May He always shield you from shame.

May you come to be, In Yisroel a shining name.

. . . May God bless you and grant you long lives.

May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you.

Sabbath inhabits many places: music, literature, pop art, philosophy. It is notoriously absent from advertising and consumer culture--the dominant

image-maker and social shaper of our day. If both Judaism and Christianity are indeed counter-cultural, here is a key place of engagement and protest—and protest while uncomfortable, is a central Christian stance. The Christ of the Gospels is time and again, in the words of the late John Stott, *the Controversialist*. Christians for one, follow St. Paul by living *in* though not *of* the world. This is unsettling work at times, but it is Gospel-work.

Sabbath is more than simply “the day we go to church.” In fact, we go to church on the “Day of Resurrection” and not the Sabbath. Sabbath speaks of the connection between humans and God-in-Christ. We practice Sabbath, because it is more than an idea; it is a lived ritual and discipline which allows the God-human relationship to deepen, by creating space for restful delight.

Think about it; If a young couple goes on honeymoon, or two older siblings vacation together, *what they do* together is less important than *the joy they share* as a result of *being together*.

For Jews, there are things *to be done* on Sabbath, and things *not to be done*. Sabbath speaks of limits and boundaries, and disciplines, and of . . . rest . . . a letting go of gainful activity . . . a loss of self-focus . . . less accumulation of stuff . . . release from anxiety about the future . . . Sabbath in fact refuses and resists everything which draws us away from the love and presence of God. Sabbath, a measure of time, in fact *expands time in a Godly direction*. Listen to these words from the German Lyric poet, Rilke:

We set the pace,
But this press of time—
take it as a little thing next to what endures.

All this hurrying soon will be over.
Only when we tarry do we touch the holy.

Young ones, don't waste your courage
racing so fast, flying so high.

**See how all things are at rest—
darkness and morning light,
blossom and book.**

Press of Time (Sonnets to Orpheus I, 22)

So there's the creation-connection. **We are invited to rest in creation itself**, which for some is a walk in woods; for others, gardening; for others micro-scientific enquiry; and for others, simply opening the eyes and enjoying what one sees.

The person who truly rests, in any relationship, relaxes because commitment and trust abound. A strong commitment, to us and to life itself from God creates a flexible, faithful and robust relationship. In each of the seven days depicted in the first chapter of Genesis, God creates and sustains a relationship, first with the galactic bodies, then with the lights, next with the components of earth, water and sky, then with the plants and non-human world, and then with humanity.

People often stop at this point, God is obviously exhausted, so needs to take a nap. God does rest, but not because of exhaustion, but because *what needs to be done has been done*. Order has emerged from chaos and everything is in right relationship. Therefore, God celebrates, confident in God's own creativity, knowing that love shared will now return to its source in order to be shared again. In every direction. Love is a renewable energy—each and every day. And love requires that renewable energy inhabit our lives and communities. It sounds like I am

using puns to make a joke; but it's no joking matter. As God relates to creation, in love, so we return that same love in an identical musical key.

In every circumstance. Sabbath is the end of all things—not our industry, or work-habits, or education or productivity. Sabbath is the life-goal, for all of us.

But we have forgotten this, or sentimentalized it, or outright ignored it. Take the test yourself. Write down on a sheet of paper what messages you take in daily. There will be many. From advertising; from friends; from literature; from school; from sacred texts; from teachers, even . . . preachers. After a half hour or so, look at the list. Who tells you what to think, or do, or purchase? What does that feel like?

Now read Genesis chapter nine. God speaks to Noah, making a dramatic promise. The world will never be ruined again. Order once established will remain.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

So it's all done; all taken care of. Provided we don't muck things up (which we do) we can enjoy life's beautiful ride. Don't take more than we need. There is enough for all. Balance work and rest. Trust in the generosity of others. Step out of the fast-lane so you can enjoy the journey. We don't have to search for God, as we hurry along. Smell the roses. **We stop doing things, even for a time, so we can freshly see what**

God is doing, right here, right now. The Sabbath rest for the people of God starts, right now. That's really Good News.

A final prayer as I close my reflection today in a tone of gratitude: A Prayer in a Celtic Tradition

Unclutter our lives, Lord
we have too much,
consume too much,
expect too much.

Grant us perspective;
to see this world
through others' eyes
than just our own.

Grant us compassion;
where there is need
to play our part
not turn aside.

Grant us gratitude
for what we have,
our daily bread
the gift of life.

Unclutter our lives, Lord,
give us space,
simplicity
thankful hearts.