

Sabbath and Joy

by Kimberlee Conway Ireton

This year on Holy Saturday—the day before Easter—I got my first-ever professional pedicure. As I drove to the salon for this girl-date with my friend Susan, I found myself balking. It wasn't the expense (Susan had given me a gift certificate) so much as the sheer frivolity of it. It's not like I needed a pedicure. No one needs a pedicure.

And then there was the date. Susan had been initially skeptical, uncertain how theologically fitting pedicural pampering was on the day Jesus lay in the tomb. She's a theologian, so she thinks about such things.

I brushed aside her concerns with a blithe, "We're getting ready for Easter." She pondered a moment and concurred. But secretly I thought: *Holy Saturday is not a day to indulge in such a frivolous act.*

When I got to the salon and shed my coat and scarf and removed my shoes and socks, I settled into the chair beside Susan's. I lowered my feet into the hot water bath—too hot, given how cold my toes were, so I rested them on the edge of the footbath, above the waterline. But slowly my toes warmed and I was able to soak both feet, toes included, in the water. The pedicurist clipped and cleaned my toenails, scrubbed my feet and legs with a salt rub, pumiced off the dead skin on my heels, wrapped my feet in hot oil, and left me for a good ten minutes to revel in the warmth and luxury of it all.

When she came back, she painted my toenails an exquisite ruby red, two coats. When they dried, they were shiny as hardened caramel.

Sitting there on my throne-like chair while a total stranger massaged my feet and clipped and painted my toenails, I felt humbled, like one of the disciples on Maundy Thursday when Jesus knelt down and washed their feet.

I didn't deserve it. Luxury like that isn't a matter of deserving. It's a gift. In my case, a gift from Susan who paid for the pedicure, and a gift from Thu who held my feet in her deft and gnarled hands.

That pedicure was pure grace.

In the days since, I've been thinking that my pedicure was a glimpse of Sabbath. I tend to think of Sabbath in terms of Things I Don't Do: I don't work on my computer; I don't check email; I don't get online. But receiving that pedicure—the grace of care I hadn't earned—enfleshed for me a different aspect of Sabbath to which God has been slowly but surely drawing my attention: Sabbath as celebration.

I am not a celebratory person. My habits of pragmatism and practicality and getting things done have taken over my life, choking out unpragmatic things like pedicures and celebrations.

But God, glory be, is not content to leave me stuck in my pragmatic habits. Sabbath, I have been coming to see these past months, is not just a time to stop and drop from weariness. In fact, that's Sabbath at its basest level—better than nothing, but not the fullness of the gift.

Gift. Sabbath is a *gift*. I don't earn Sabbath, and I don't deserve it, any more than I earned or deserved that pedicure. That's a hard pill to swallow. I often act like Sabbath is a reward for a week of hard work, the day I get to take a nap in the middle of the day because I'm not allowed to work anyway, and dang it, I've earned that nap!

But that's not what Sabbath is about, not really. No work and a nap are probably a good start, but Sabbath is so much more. Sabbath is a way of being in the world on days other than Sunday. Sabbath is margin and gift and joy. Sabbath is soaking myself—or rather, letting myself be soaked—in the unmerited, unmeritable grace of God.

On Easter, the day after my pedicure-of-grace, we had a big celebration at church, and another one at our house afterward. I went for a walk in the sunshine and talked to my mom on the phone and enjoyed a meal with my family and friends. I celebrated. (I also took a nap.)

Theologically speaking, every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Every Sunday is a celebration of unmerited, unmeritable grace. Sabbath is an invitation to live in that celebratory space. I want to accept the invitation. I want to live in Sabbath grace more often, more fully. I want to live in Sabbath joy, the joy of receiving a great, big, unearned gift.

I think it's time to schedule another pedicure.

Prayer:

God of unmeritable grace,

Thank you! Thank you for giving us such a great, big unearned gift called Sabbath. Thank you for continuing to invite us into this celebratory space which allows us to rest, glorify your creation, and find joy in Jesus' life and resurrection. Help us to keep Sabbath so we may continue to follow Christ.

In your name, we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. When have you experienced undeserved gifts or grace? Was it easy or hard to accept?
2. How can you show the unmeritable grace of God to others?
3. What celebratory practices can you incorporate into your Sabbath?

<http://www.thehighcalling.org/faith/reclaiming-sabbath-keeping-sabbath-celebration#.U9JqXvldXXd>