

# Sabbath and Sabbatical

*by Elizabeth Nordquist*

“On the Sabbath we cease from our work, so that God can do God’s work in us,” says John Calvin. After the crunch, comes a time for rest and restoration. Marva Dawn in her book, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, has limned four planes or movements for the Sabbath experience: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting. I am ready to enter each and every one.

I am returning to the land of the only occasionally employed from an almost full time appointment, and I am deeply aware of my need to be restored, refreshed, renewed and replenished. I have had a joyful season of hard and meaningful work in a church that I love, and my heart is full of gratitude. But I am tired. I know that the spirituality of daily work is one of urgency, immediacy, vigilance, and prayers for protection. Even with days off, my thoughts and imaginings and prayers were full, fast and furious. Now I am on sabbatical, so to speak; it was in such a sabbatical place that the invitation and discernment came to step into the gap “for such a time as this.” Now I am being called back to that space for God, where I can be open once again to see what God has next for me.

So I am claiming a brief sabbatical to clear the way and open myself up to the next thing that God will do in me. Ceasing seems to be the easiest on the face of it: no more 50 miles round trip drive daily, no more extra e-mail address, no more leaping in imagination from the last sermon to the next one. Harder to stop for me are the mental gymnastics or as the Psalmist calls them, “eating the bread of anxious toil.” In leaving that appointment, I have entrusted that community and its system to the Holy One; it is no longer my responsibility. Peace, cease, and be still.

And to rest. I am glad to enter into the rest that God has prepared for me, but I find that my synapses and my adrenaline have been calibrated to a higher, more intense speed. Initially I have to work to sit still, to “let the mud settle,” to breathe more deeply. For a season I do need more sleep, more relaxation. As a “human doing” I can spin out an entire list of things that must be done with relationships, in the house, in the community. But right now I need to rest in the Lord, wait patiently as God brings to my awareness my heart’s desire.

Embracing is among the joys of Sabbath. I now have time for lunches and coffees, even longer trips by which to reconnect with people outside the circle of my work life. And there is artwork to see, music to hear, landscapes and vistas to savor. Books have stacked up beside my bed that have nothing to do with a task before me. I can entertain a writing style or a trajectory of thought that is intriguing, that connects to another idea for the sheer joy of it in the complex inter-connectedness of God’s creative gifts in and to the world. “O world, I cannot hold you close enough!”

Feasting is deeply connected in my heart to the goodness found in the community of the faithful. Whether it is cake on the patio between services or soup for two looking out over the ocean, bread that is shared is more than bread; it becomes bread for the journey and strength for the day. So I look forward to the days of gentle breakfasting, lunching and supping with loving companions as my strength is restored.

And I am ceasing and resting from blogging for two weeks. I intended when I began my blog to write for three months; I am now in my second year. I want to clear away the imaginative space in which the blog springs forth, let it be still, restored, protected, loved and nourished by the Bread of Heaven and the Latter Rains of the Spirit that refresh and restore.

Peace, be still; the storm rages. Peace, be still.

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**Prayer:**

Creative God,

We want to follow Jesus' command to find peace, and be still. Storms rage in our lives, sometimes in our own churches, our own homes, our own communities. We pray we may find the strength we need in you, so we may cease, rest, embrace, and feast in light of the Sabbath.

In joy, we pray. Amen.

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**Questions:**

1. Is there anything in your life you would like to take a Sabbatical from? What kind of perspective do you think you could gain by stepping back that you can't get when you are in the midst of your responsibilities?
2. Do you ever get so busy you want to hide from the world? What can you do to embrace the good gifts that God has given you instead?
3. Do you eat meals rushed and alone, or are you able to take the time to celebrate and enjoy meals with family and friends? How can you make communal meals more a part of your routine?