

All Things Shall Be Well
Deut. 5:12-15, 15:1-2; Ex 23: 10-11; Lev 25: 8-12
October 13, 2019
Rev. Dr. Marcia B. Bailey, preaching

This week I read the words of Eric Law and began to consider what the holy currency of "wellness" is all about; Law starts by viewing it through the lens sabbath. I wondered if my best response was laughter or tears. Because, my context, my week was not looking like wellness, rest or anything that remotely resembled anything near sabbatical. Let me give you a quick glimpse- it began with...

...learning that a clergy friend of mine had just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He awaits a bioscopy result but surgery is not an option. The next day I received this enormous tracking device/watch that I have to wear for a week; it marks the 36th month of the clinical trial I have been participating in since finishing my breast cancer treatment. There's nothing like hearing about someone else's diagnosis (and wearing a visible reminder) to force you to relive your own.

The day after both those things I got an email from my bathroom scale; yes, I said "my bathroom scale emailed me." It seems that the fitness tracker I usually wear had been alerted by my bathroom scale that the scales' battery was getting low and so the tracker sent a message to my email account on behalf of the scale; who knew that was possible? Add to *that* the reality that this is mid-term for us at Temple University, and my students are overwhelmed, over-caffeinated, under-rested and under-prepared, making them a grumpy and miserable bunch. Me? I can't seem to get out from under of endless grading.

And then I found myself in the 18th hour of my too-long Thursday working on this sermon after I got home from the Ministry Coordination team meeting because I was trying to get out of town on Friday afternoon for 24 hours for my own refreshment, some “sabbath” if you will...and the irony of thinking about that and wellness was enough to make me laugh out loud! What is “wellness” and how does one begin to understand, let alone claim, “sabbath” in the midst of the way we live our fast paced and too full lives?! Good question!

We are continuing to explore Eric Law’s “holy currencies” and this week we are considering the currency of wellness. (Laura will help us think about this in our adult Learning Community) Law begins to talk about this idea of “wellness” by reminding us of these admonitions we find in the Hebrew Bible: the call to weekly sabbath keeping, the invitation to a sabbatical year, and finally, the vision of a Jubilee, once every 50 years.

This idea of sabbath keeping begins in the creation account recorded in Gen 1. When all of creation has been completed, we are told that God took a day off, “rested” and that God “blessed” the seventh day and made it “holy”. How interesting, then to discover that there is evidently quite a debate about all this sabbath stuff! Of course, it’s an important element in Judaism, but not because of the creation. Rather, it’s important because sabbath is connected with the rescue from Egypt and the giving of the 10 Commandments, which also sets aside a day different from the rest. Some Christians argue that because we no longer live “under the law” that all this sabbath stuff is no longer required for us. Others argue that the creation account was earlier than the Exodus event and so we *should* set time apart. Besides, we know Jesus took time apart from his disciples and ministry to refresh himself, going to the desert, across the sea, to the mountains to pray, rest, find quiet, and peace. Some argue that that in

itself should be enough to motivate us to do the same. Regardless of where it all begins, the reality is that many of us, myself included, struggle to find a time and space where we can begin to “rest”, to foster our own “wellness” and to devote ourselves to some restorative practice that the text seems to expect us to fulfill.

Let’s face it, we live in a 24/7 world. We are rewarded, either outright or subtly, for being busy all the time! Not many of us have days anymore where there is “nothing to do.” It feels sometimes like a competition: “I’m so busy” we say, listing off the things we need to do until we’re interrupted by someone else eager to show their list is longer! What’s that about? Wellness? Sabbath? I don’t think so! There are very few of us who work a 40-hour week anymore. I have always said I fanaticize about working for McDonald’s: flip the burger, wipe the counter, take the order and then go home, done! Instead I chose two jobs that are never done! Somehow as a society we have convinced ourselves that more work is somehow better; that 60 hours of work accomplishes more 40. That because we *can* extend our days with artificial light and push ourselves with the help of machines, we should. We think it makes us better people, more valuable workers, more faithful Christians if we can earn our way into God’s presence by being the last one to turn off the light. No wonder it doesn’t seem like we have a very clear grasp on self-care and sabbath keeping!

What’s the purpose of this “day/year/season” off”? It is to be *well*! To create a decided break in the routine to intentionally stop, rest, reflect. It is a time to restore, rejuvenate, recover from the activities and work of the rest of our lives, as well as a time to re-engage in our relationships with each other, with the earth itself and with God. Sundays used to be that day. But today Sundays are as full as any other day. For some, with church activities, but for

most, with sports and work and everyday chores like grocery shopping, meal prep and laundry that just doesn't happen any other time. How are we to honor this divine invitation in the world we currently live in? How do we make both the interior and exterior space to claim God's intention for us to care for ourselves, and for our relationships with others and with the earth?

Because that's what this wellness thing is all about. It's more than getting ourselves to the gym or taking a walk around the block, although that is tending to our physical selves. It's about loving and honoring ourselves in such a way that we routinely can say "enough". It's about valuing our relationships with others that we can say "I forgive" and let go of whatever separates us, including financial debts, obligations and expectations. It's about discovering life in the world around us and drinking that in in ways that infuse our very beings with creation's energy, abundance and life. That sounds more like a recipe for wellness than anything my insurance company can devise!

The question is, how many of us *do* any of this, in any sort of regular, meaningful way? What is it that *you* do to make space for sabbath keeping in your life; how do you prioritize time and energy to cultivate relationships—with others, with yourself, with the earth, with God? When and how do you rest: physically, emotionally, mentally from the demands and responsibilities of your daily life? What refreshes you? Restores you? Invigorates you? Gives you the energy and desire to begin again?

These are important questions for us to ask ourselves, and to ask one another as we think about cultivating and exchanging the currency of wellness; we can't invite others to be whole persons if we are not likewise on that journey. How might we help one another and give permission to one another to think seriously about our own self-care? How do we each, as an

act of conscious stewardship, prioritize ourselves and our time in such a way that we make space for renewal- weekly, annually, regularly-- in order to deepen our reservoirs so that we might be our best for ourselves, each other and for God?

There are many ideas about what might help us to create this generative space, any of which could be helpful and inform our practice. But first we need to decide that we will *have* a “practice,” an intention to care so deeply and genuinely for ourselves---as God does---that we prioritize wellness in our own lives. And only when we chose this for ourselves, can we begin to invite others to choose it for themselves—to make space to cultivate loving, honest relationships, to invest deeply in one another and in the community, to care actively, passionately for the earth, to give generously, enthusiastically to that which calls to us. Sabbath keeping reminds us, in a small but life-altering way, that we can stepping out of the world’s wildness for a few hours, a day, maybe even more is a radical act, and when we do that, things will go on or wait, and we will be better for having rested. Wellness invites us to discover wholeness in every aspect of our lives and to see in this gift an opportunity for new life.

And so Friday afternoon I packed my tent in my car. I drove to a point on the Chesapeake called “Elk Neck” and I walked in the woods and sat by a fire drinking mulled wine and eating chocolate. I laughed with friends, had time with my daughter, and snuggled into my sleeping bag, delighted to be “sleeping under canvas,”(as we say in my family) at least for one night, something that deeply restores my soul.

I invite you, amidst all the business of our lives---and the business of our life together here-to love yourself as God does, and to claim the time and space to allow wellness to pervade your

life. You will be more you, more joyful, more loving, more playful if you do, and you will bear witness to God's desire for each and every one of us.