

God saw that it was good. What do you see?

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

In the beginning there was great possibility, infinite possibility. One of the first things to be created was a pattern, a rhythm, a routine. In the beginning God created day and night, a rhythm of time and it was good. What God created was an ecosystem that is dependent upon one another would create some more. When we think about it in the beginning there was emptiness, a void, a void from which life emerged.

In the month of June, we will be exploring the spiritual practice of Sabbath in worship and devotions, in prayer and in programming. The practice of Sabbath was created in the beginning. We all know how the first creation myth ends. It ends with God resting on the 7th day and we're left with the impression that God's work is done, but after the 7th day of rest the cycle of creation begins again. And really if you think about it at the end of each day there was morning and there was evening the next day. Each day comes with a time of pause, rest, and reflection.

Wayne Mueller, who wrote *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, suggests that God was still creating on the 7th day. "What God created on that 7th day was Manuha which is Hebrew for tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose: a healing stillness."¹ The rhythm is simple, God creates, God acts, and God pauses and rests. It is as simple as breathing. God inhales while creating and exhales while taking a moment of Sabbath rest. God inhales energy and love and exhales life into all that has been created and God saw that it was good. In reading this book on Sabbath, Wayne Mueller got me to think. He wrote,

"If we believe life is fundamentally good, we will still seek out rest as a taste of that goodness. If we believe life is fundamentally bad or flawed, we will be reluctant to quiet ourselves afraid of meeting the darkness that resides in things or in ourselves."

²

Think about it, when we go to bed with the weight of the world on our shoulders, with our minds unable to let go of all that is wrong in this world, we do not sleep, we wrestle. We wrestle with our feelings and thoughts in the darkness afraid of what we might discover, and we do not sleep

¹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), p. 37.

² _____, p. 40.

well. It is not restful sleep. I must admit that the past few weeks have not been all that restful and while I look out at all of creation my inclination is to see that it is not good. What I see is injustice. What I see is struggle. I see pain. What I see is suffering. I see systematic racism and it is not good. In the story of creation God breathed life into every living creature so why would a human take that breath from another, from another living being. Why is it that human beings have taken the gift of creation which God has given to us, to have dominion over and instead have chosen to dominate it? We are called to live with respect in creation. God calls us to believe that creation is love, that to have dominion over something is to show love and respect for all creation is good.

In the most recent statement of faith written by the United Church of Canada in 2006, it names our role as faithful Christians in the destruction of God's creation. These statements in this statement of faith acknowledges our failures and helps us to learn from our mistakes and instead work towards seeking justice and resisting evil. I want to read a portion of this to you because I think it is powerful and has a lot to say to what we're experiencing right now. It says,

*'Made in the image of God we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God, yet we choose to turn away from God we surrender ourselves to sin. A disposition revealed selfishness, cowardice, or apathy. Becoming bound and complacent in a web of false desires and wrong choices, we bring harm to ourselves and others. This brokenness in human life and community is an outcome of sin. Sin is not only personal, but accumulates, to become habitual and systematic forms of injustice, violence and hatred. We are all touched by this brokenness, the rise of selfish individualism that erodes human solidarity, the concentration of wealth and power without regard for the needs of all, the toxins of religious and ethnic bigotry, the degradation of the blessedness of human bodies and human passions through sexual exploitation, the delusion of unchecked progress and limitless growth that threatens our home the earth, the covert despair that lulls many into numb complicity with empires and systems of domination. We sing of lament and repentance yet evil does not cannot undermine or overcome the love of God. God forgives and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings with honesty and humility. God reconciles and calls us to repent the part we have played in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other. God transforms and calls us to protect the vulnerable, to pray for deliverance from evil, to work with God for the healing of the world that all might have abundant life. We sing of grace.'*³

Practicing Sabbath is so important. When we practice Sabbath, it calls us to pause, to reflect and to see. The rallies over the past weeks have called us also to pause. People are pausing and taking a knee to remember, to acknowledge, to act and to protest in peaceful ways. Watching the news doesn't always show the whole picture. What we see is only what is in the frame. When I move

³ A Song of Faith, The United Church of Canada, a statement of Faith, 2003.

out of the frame what I see is the collective tears of people who care for this world. I see a flag that symbolizes the importance of all people, where all people are respected and loved; loved by God. Here in Edmonton during the virtual rally we have been called to be the change. We need to be co-creators. In creating a world that when God looks out and when we pause and rest and look out at the world, we too will see that it is good. God creates with infinite possibilities which means healing is possible. Change, transformation is possible. In the story of Creation after each day God made room for more. Each day God added a new layer to the beauty of all creation, providing creation with a rich diversity that wasn't divisive. It was interwoven to create a whole ecosystem that relies on every living thing for it to work.

As Dave Bland a preacher wrote,

“It begins with creation. This means we must jettison any ethnic, parochial, or provincial understanding of God. God is a universal God, not a God of any one people, nation, or race... Nothing is made of itself alone. Everything contributes to the whole of creation.”⁴

Our faith is not something to hide behind for protection. Our faith does not live inside the walls of the sanctuary. Our faith is lived out in the world, being created in the image of God, in their likeness means that we are taught to love one another, to love all living things, to treat all creation with dignity and to live out our statement of welcome and inclusion. We too need to find more ways to make space and that doesn't come from sitting idly by. We need to make space for all voices, space for all people, for each life is of value. When we discipline ourselves to live the rhythm of Sabbath, we make space to pause and see what is outside the frame of our attention. It's extremely easy to only see what we want to see to focus in only on the good things, but we need to be open to what God sees. For we are called to be co-creators which means we need to act, and the time is now.

So even though at first I looked out these past weeks and saw that all was not good, I looked past what was in that frame, I saw people who had been sitting idly by suddenly stand and walk with others. People who have turned away from seeing racism that exists not only in the US but in Canada and all around the world got up and said this needs to change, what has been happening is wrong. I've seen police and protesters both peacefully taking a knee together in the face of injustice. I've seen people around the world saying that what happened to George Floyd is not okay; it's a crime, and it needs to stop. I've also seen leaders of faith pointing out that faith and our religious symbols are not just here to be looked at and held up for a photo-op. That by doing that it takes away from the true gospel message which is one where we care for one another, we do not act in violence, we seek peace and we seek justice.

⁴ Dave Bland, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A Volume 3, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 27-29.

Being Christian means being a living sacrament in the world. A sacrament is the visible sign of the invisible love of God. We are being called to be that visible sign of God's love in the world. We must remember that God forgives, God reconciles, and God transforms through us. And when God creates and pauses and looks at what has been created God looks and sees what is good. So, let us look upon each person in this world and see the good and work towards peace for all. Thanks be to God. Amen.