



LESSONS IN LIVING

“How Christianity Forgot the Eighth Day”

A St. Andrew’s Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
April 28, 2024

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (*Inclusive Bible*)

Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as YHWH, your God, commanded. For six days you will labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to YHWH, your God. You will do no work that day, neither you nor your daughter nor your son nor your workers—women or men—nor your ox nor your donkey, nor any of your animals; nor even foreigners among you. Thus your workers—both women and men—will rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that YHWH, your God, brought you out from there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; because of this, YHWH, your God, has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

John 20:1-2, 11-18 (*Inclusive Bible*)

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance, so she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple—the one Jesus loved—and told them, “The Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! We don’t know where they have put Jesus!”

Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus’ body had lain. They asked her, “Why are you weeping?” She answered them, “Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don’t know where they have put the body.” No sooner had she said this than she turned around and caught sight of Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was Jesus. He asked her, “Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” She supposed it was the gardener, so she said, “Please, if you’re the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you’ve laid the body and I will take it away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned to him and said, “Rabboni!”—which means “Teacher”. Jesus then said, “Don’t hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to God. Rather, go to the sisters and brothers and tell them, ‘I’m ascending to my Parent and to your Parent, my God and your God!’” Mary of Magdala went to the disciples. “I have seen the Teacher!” she announced. Then she reported what the savior had said to her.

*YHWH represents the divine name found in the Hebrew text. It represents the Divine Mystery which, following Jewish tradition, is not pronounced. Instead, we say “God” or “the Holy One” or some other term of reverence.

Sermon

We're going through and looking at what I believe are parts of the original faith that fell out along the way. You know the story that when Christianity began, it was very rich and interactive. It wove in with things like the Goddess religion that the later Church decided they didn't want that to be a part of the story, but it *is* a part of the story. It's right there. If you go back, you can look at it. We're going through the Divine Name, the Shemá, some of the classic cornerstones. Don't feel bad if none of that sounds familiar because you've already missed those sermons, so you're fine. *(Laughter)*

Today we're going to look at the Sabbath a little differently than possibly you've heard before. We looked at the Sabbath earlier as a human rights document. When preachers talk about honoring the Sabbath, they talk about coming to church, and I'm not against that. *(Laughter)* But if you look at the verse, there's nothing about church in here. There's nothing about religion. It's about social justice. It's about not misusing workers.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Inclusive Bible)

Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as YHWH, your God, commanded. For six days you will labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to YHWH, your God. You will do no work that day, neither you nor your daughter nor your son nor your workers—women or men—nor your ox nor your donkey, nor any of your animals; nor even foreigners among you. Thus your workers—both women and men—will rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that YHWH, your God, brought you out from there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; because of this, YHWH, your God, has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

You'll look at this, it goes, "*honor the Sabbath, keep it holy. For six days, you will labor, you'll do your work. On the seventh day, you'll do no work that day.*" And it lists everyone else. And it basically lists out everybody, so nobody gets left mind. The gender stuff is spelled out, the class stuff, whether you're freed or enslaved. Everybody gets a day where they can just be a human being and not be a beast of burden. But what's funny is you see the vision is very limited at this point. It goes, "*you'll do no work, your men, nor women, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your animals, nor even foreigners among you.*" That just shows you it was easier to make the case with the donkey than it was with somebody. A lot of the government in Texas feels the same way about border issues. But you see there an idea of universal humanity that has never fully been recognized in Christianity. There's always been scapegoats people go after.

But if you look at basically the calling, it's your whole human family, all of it, no scapegoats whatsoever. But that's hard to do. You get tired, you get frustrated, you look at the world, you want social justice, but it doesn't look like there's any way that's going to happen sometimes. You look at it and you just despair.

Today, we're looking at a mystical Sabbath. You have the traditional Sabbath that was there. But in the Resurrection stories, they're going to try to reframe who you think you are. Let's look at the next verse. In these passages, what's going to happen happens the day after the Sabbath.

John 20:1-2, 11-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

The Sabbath was the seventh day. And in the literature, they talk about the eighth day, which is something that happens within you. It's almost like a musical place inside of you. I believe the Resurrection stories were actually stories about awakening, about enlightenment, that kind of thing. Because if you look at the stories, they contradict themselves. The people that were in the cave, the people that got there first, they didn't try to make it consistent, which tells you *that* was not the point. The point was that something historically happened. The point is something happened within the disciples where they stepped out of ordinary time. They felt connections that were deeper and broader than what was happening to them physically.

In this story, it talks about on the first day of the week. When you see that, consider it an invitation to go into your intuition, into your imagination, and to picture yourself as so much more than what happens to you, than what other people think of you, than your success. Because throughout most of history, the better you are, the less likely it is that you will be successful in any kind of sensibility. So do not blame yourself if you can't make the world turn around on a dime at this really hard time.

I want to read it, just a couple of quotes that I think will help from the early Church. I never ask you to take my word for it. You've known me too long. And again, it's very important in the

Christian story, Clergy are the problem 90% of the time. And the reason it's not that we're evil, it's that when it's your *job*, you have a tendency to rationalize. And when you go to Seminary, there's these enticements to feel like you've got special privilege and stuff. None of that is a part of the Christian message. Tolerate us, please. Be nice to us. Don't make fun of us or push us down.

But this is something you discover within yourself. This is not something that a clergy person can give you. But listen to these words. This is from a book called The Gospel of Barnabas:

"I will make a beginning on the eighth day that is the beginning of another world. For that reason, we also keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead."

Justin Martyr said that

"The eighth day possessed a certain mysterious significance, which the seventh day did not."

Cyprian wrote that the Jewish practice of circumcision on the eighth day was a foreshadowing. That there's a part of you that can't be defined by life, by what happens to you. There's a part of you that's mysterious. This idea of the Sabbath is stopping to make time to remember that, because you can get swept along. You have so many tasks, so many things you have to do. When you lose that part of yourself that's your connection with the sacred, with the mystery.

What I want to do is walk through and have three ideas of what I'm calling "*Enlightenment*." If that makes you uncomfortable, you can use a different word. But I want to go through and see an awaking that takes place.

First of all, with the idea of time. The Sabbath was something where you would set aside a certain day. The people lived in the desert. There weren't a whole lot of markers in their world, so time became very important. You can get so lost in time that you feel you're being swept along. And that's a very bad feeling when you're sitting there and the people you love and you care about are just dropping like flies. The older you get, you read the obituaries and you can come to feel that more of you is alive in the past than in the present. If you're young, you have the opposite problem where you don't feel like you're established yet. It's so frustrating. You have no credibility with the culture, and yet you have all these aspirations inside of you. Sabbath simply means to *stop*. To stop in motion, to remember who you are. Paul Tillich called it The Eternal Now.

A lot of times when we talk about eternity, we talk about something that's supposed to happen in the future. We talk about after we die, what's going to happen to us, the second coming of Christ. All of that stuff is figurative and mythological. Why do I say that? Because if we're talking about the sacred, the sacred is everywhere. In theological terms, if Jesus is God, Jesus is already here, so the second coming can't happen in that physical sense. Because the sacred can't be somewhere else. But we need mythological things to find our inner wisdom a lot of times. A lot of times we have to go on a journey to discover where we are and who we are.

In our story, the disciples think they're going to a funeral. They think that the last person that will be there is Jesus. They get there and Mary has the experience of someone who reminds her of Jesus, but it doesn't look like Jesus. It looks like the gardener. Now, that's a really interesting

image. When you think about the Garden of Eden, all of the atonement theories where God's supposed to be mad and make these sacrifices. And then instead, it's when you remember who you are, you're back in the garden again. The treasure is not someplace else. You don't have to wait for the universe to change before the gift can be given you. It's already inside you.

When you love and lose, and it will happen, the secret is to go deeper into the love, so that you identify less with the form that was there and more with this kind of dance that you shared with somebody. Because that's the River of Life. And that's what doesn't have beginning and end. Everything that has shape and form will pass. But there's something that's been happening for a long, long time, and it sure looks to me like it deserves the word *Eternal*. You can decide that.

But there's a cosmic process that goes *way, way* back. When you look up at the stars, it's like you're looking at these incredible disparate times. Some of them are not that old, but some of them are *very, very* old. And you're looking across light years and light years, hundreds of light years, at stars that may not even be there anymore. So time is very strange. And what Love does is tell you that Love never dies. When you go inside, you lose a lot of things, but that connection you have with the other person is right there inside you.

So the first awakening is that you can step outside of time in the sense of when you really become aware of something, even a flower. You see a flower and you let it overwhelm you. That's the Eighth Day. You're stepping out of time. If you've ever had something beautiful make time stop for you, that's what the story is talking about. And it's not something that's reserved for mystics, certainly not the clergy. It's something that's is always there waiting for you when you become still.

The second awakening, I think, is in space. We might call the *Infinite Here*. And that's the idea that you don't have to find the special place. That wherever you are is a sampler platter of the whole universe. You think that you look out at a star for all you know, somebody circulating around that star is looking at us and wishing they knew what was over here. It's the same elements all over the place.

So that sense of frustration that there's somewhere else you need to get to discover the secret of life is a mistake. Whenever you stop, you're back in the garden again. Wherever it is, you are because you remember your ties to life, to nature. When Christianity cut ties with the Goddess it cut ties to nature and became a real problem. A lot of this is just getting back to what it used to be.

The sacred mountain is inside of you. The burning bush is inside of you. Jerusalem is inside of you. Returning to your own center gives you the balance that you're looking for in life. Do you remember the tilt-a-whirl on the playground? Do they still have that even? It's fascinating to me because you have this little circular metal thing. And when you're standing on the perimeter of it, it throws you off. But if you stand right in the middle, you can keep your balance. And I think that's this notion of the Sabbath. When you end your journeys, you come to where you truly are, you find your balance, you find the sacred mountain, which is actually within us.

And then here's the third thing to think about this week, if you have some time. And that's what I would call the *Universal We*. When we're given a small notion of who we are, when I think I'm a worker, when I think I'm an American, when I think I'm a Christian, I can only open my wings so far. How is it possible that people in this nation talked about freedom for centuries as they held an enslaved people? That tells you that the sense of identity was too small. How is it that so many men in the Christian church are terrified of women? Terrified of women having power. And they visit that out on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people. Think how much richer your life would be if your wings opened up to include your whole human family with no scapegoats, no exceptions whatsoever.

If you look around the world in different mystery religions and different mystic religions, they have what's sometimes called the Supreme Identity. I'm calling it the Universal We. Emerson called it the Over Soul. But it's the idea that your true identity is linked to everyone else. You're not just standing on the side of things. We're all interconnected. And there's a sense in which we all die, but there's something deeper happening when we love one another. That seems to be so much more enduring.

Has anybody here ever gotten married thinking they were just going to marry that one person? (*Laughter*) You know what I'm saying? I think that you wouldn't have to love their friends and family. Big mistake. To truly love another person, you have to open up and love the people that they love. And then together, you can learn to love the people that are harder to love. And you find your home in the human family. You find your home in the web of life. In the circle of nature.

If your life is not tuned to nature, if it's tuned just to the teachings of the Church, there's a poverty in your life. When you go to church, you try to feel sacred, but then you go outside where it really is happening. But it's also inside, right? Our lives are woven together. The Sabbath was a new view of humankind. Neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. You will not categorize people and take away their humanity. But let me just do at least a moment of anticapitalism because it's killing us, and we cannot solve any problem we have until eventually people realize that you can't base values on property rights and have a world you want to live in.

The Sabbath was a new economic system. And that's when it talks about you won't work seven days a week anymore, and you won't mistreat anyone. That it's a new idea that Jesus called the *Kindom*, which was a way of living life and sharing the world together in a way where every person can have dignity and hope.

I think we need both Sabbaths. We need that goal of universal human rights. But we also need a place to go when we're discouraged, when we don't see the hope of that ever happening. And what our passage, I believe, reminds us is that when we stop on this feverish pitch to get somewhere else, we remember that the treasure is within us. When we stop in time, we realize that there's something enduring about love that is stronger in many ways than even death. And then finally, when we remember this mystical stepping out of seven days into the eighth day, which is your art. It's your imagination. You realize that that hope cannot be defeated because it's

inside you. It's written inside you. You are connected to every being on the planet. The love that you exchange is magnificent and timeless in a way that our forms are not.

So the last gift, I think, of the passage is to realize that no matter how lost you may feel, if you will simply get still and get silent and get present, you will realize that that Sabbath is already happening in your heart now.

Well, that's my struggles with the passage. We'll take a few moments for you to reflect how you would understand it.

Benediction

I think in a nutshell, what I understood the passage to be saying, or this idea of a mystical Sabbath, is that you don't have to go somewhere else to find the treasure, that you don't have to wait for something miraculous to happen. These are not stories of physical miracles. They're stories of altered states where people have a deeper sense of connection than maybe they had before.

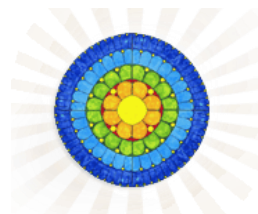
As you go out in this week, when you look around and you can't figure out how to have hope with things looking so bad, sometimes just stopping and being where you are, going more deeply within yourself and remembering what the ties that bind you with everyone else, that a lot of times you're carrying this hope with you in ways that you're not even aware.

So again, thank you so much for sharing the morning with us. Babs, can you take us home?

No, I can't take everybody home!

Each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. And that spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go out into this wonderful creation and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

14311 Wells Port Dr.
Austin, TX 78728
512-251-0698
admin@staopen.org