



Sabbath

Each month worship, religious education, community outreach ministry, covenant groups and Wellspring Wednesday programs will offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss an intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in effective and positive ways. June's theme is... Sabbath.

Sabbath, you might say, is a practice as old as time. It harkens back to the biblical book of Genesis and its seven-day story of creation. After six busy days of continually unfolding creation, the story says, "On the seventh day, God finished all God's work." God rested. In other words, as the ancient rabbis explained, it was God's resting that completed creation on the seventh day, coming full circle and bringing into creation peaceful repose, tranquility and stillness.

It's not a new idea to say that creation or creativity springs from emptiness and stillness. We know that a painting is shaped by its white space; poetry, as one poet puts it, is "the orphan of silence," and music is the cadence of its rests. As Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "Space is the breath of art." But here, in the bible story's perfect circle, we have creation both begun and completed in stillness and space.

It is, then, in remembrance of this full circle and the holiness of creation completed that God later commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath or the seventh day holy by reserving it for stillness and for rest.

The Sabbath, in a sense, is a temple in time. Set aside as holy space, it is intended to be adorned with beauty and joyful singing and the glad gathering of community. It is a time for worship, for the sharing of food and fellowship, for enjoying nature, for intimate love and for laughter and conversation.

Many of us today might welcome this idea in theory. The culture we live in is so relentlessly hitched to its 24/7 momentum and its time is so jam-

packed, that the possibility of a full day for rest and repose might sound as blissful as it appears unachievable. But the great promise of this practice is a gift that also asks something of us. It requires that we let ourselves belong to something larger than ourselves.

As practiced in Judaism, keeping Sabbath is not an individual decision to rest made by our own whim and will. It is not the same as the day off we plan for ourselves in reward for hard work well done or whenever our personal batteries run low. These may be good and necessary, but they are not Sabbath. Sabbath is a communal practice protected by and for the whole community; and it is a rhythm of rest governed by forces wholly outside of human time. It begins neither when we are tired, nor when our work is done. It begins every Friday of every week exactly at sundown. It begins whether we are ready or not, when the earth turns just far enough on the sixth day and the sun slips out of sight. That's when the candles are lit and the blessings begin.

What discipline this must require. It would put my work – and my prerogative – into a wholly different perspective to nod to the sun's authority in the same way that I once followed the standardized test proctor's command, saying "Stop. Put your pencils down. Do not finish your sentence."

Imagine that. A weekly commandment to stop in mid-sentence. Could I do it now?

It's tempting to think I wouldn't want to, but this misses the point of the Sabbath's rare gift. The gift of a day outside of human time. The gift of holy time for "the seed of eternity planted in the soul," as Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it. The gift of letting my work and my time rest while I'm held by the larger work of

creation completed and by the larger time of the universe. This is the gift of Sabbath.

— Karen Hering,
Assistant Literary Minister

Worship Theme Resources

BOOKS

An Altar in the World: a Geography of Faith by Barbara Brown Taylor

Present Moment, Wonderful Moment by Thich Nhat Hanh

Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller

The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh

Putting Family First by William Doherty and Barbara Carlson

The Hurried Child by David Elkind

Creating Balance in Your Child's Life by Beth Saavedra

Living Simply with Children by Marie Sherlock

FILMS

Stillness and reflection explored.

Soul Food

A 1997 film starring Vanessa L. Williams and Vivica Fox that tells the story of family on the brink of dissolution following the illness of the matriarch of the family. What will still the family enough to return to togetherness?

On Golden Pond

A 1981 film that tells the story of a family on the banks of a body of water to which they have returned over the course of many years

The Big Chill

A 1983 film that tells the story of a family of college friends on the brink of disillusionment after the untimely death of one of their members.

Families!

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