

SABBATICAL MEMORY

This is the second installment on the holiness of memory. I realize this article is a little thick, but I invite you to trudge through and wrestle with it. As always, if you have any questions or would like to further discuss any *Vicar's Voice* themes, my door is always open.

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*Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. – Exodus 20:8*

“This I do in quiet ways, that on your lonely path, you may not walk alone.” – Howard Thurman

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The Sabbath day, or Shabbat as it's called in Hebrew, was honored in ancient Jewish-Christian tradition when God rested at the end of the Genesis 1.1-2.2 creation story. On the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, God looked over what had been created and called it good. Then God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy because it was the day God rested. In Sabbaths throughout time, humans have followed God's lead by pausing, resting, relaxing, and remembering the good things that were created and God's divine work in them. Dr. Vitor Westhelle, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), says that in the Sabbath we are called to observe not our own work, but God's divine work in the world around us.

In the gospels, the Sabbath is also remembered as the day of mourning that was observed by the women who were preparing to anoint Jesus' body after the crucifixion. On this *crucifixion* Sabbath, they remembered what happened between “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday.” Their remembering Jesus on that heartbreaking Sabbath was important for the early Jesus-followers because it was a way to remember the stories of their beloved leader, teacher, and Lord. Despite the pain and sadness they must have felt after his crucifixion, these women kept alive the memory of the God who they felt had abandoned *them* on the cross; however, they remembered Jesus as their Savior on the Sabbath against all odds.

Taking the time to observe Sabbath, like God and the gospel women, does not require us to pause only one day a week, but rather invites us to stop and remember God, creation, and other people every day of our lives. The daily Sabbath moves us to remember creation and other people in a way that lifts them up and brings them into our hearts and minds. When caregivers care for others, especially elderly adults who struggle with memory loss, the Sabbath is kept holy when forgotten stories are remembered against the odds of memory failure and when those stories are celebrated. This remembrance of their memory honors the grace that God has given them throughout their lives. When we remember those who forget, we are gracing them and realizing (making real) God's unfailing memory of them.

Joy Philip, Ph.D student at LSTC, suggests that Sabbath is a time of *disruptive* remembrance, which opens up the possibilities of change in our perspectives because remembering the Sabbath reflects the past, which speaks to the present, and informs the future. Remembering the memories of those who forget their own story gives justice, dignity, and respect to the lost memories and the person(s) themselves. This sabbatical memory remembers the “other” who suffers with illnesses and who is often forgotten by a community when they forget. Sabbatical memory opens the storehouse of memories, creates the way for justice to take place, and stands in solidarity with our shared history.