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Letting it lie

Continued from page one
Clock time
and Sabbath time

Leviticus 25 creates a glorious picture. It envisions people allowed a homecoming, slaves breathing fresh air again, the end of demeaning deprivation. What sets the stage for this all-restoring activity is a "Sabbath of complete rest for the land." It is good agriculture not to wear out the land. And it is good soul-care not to wear yourself out. Instead, step back from the endless cycles of productivity and recognize the Lord of all that is. Deep in the consciousness of Jubilee is that everything is God's: "The Lord's are the earth and its fullness: the world and those who dwell on it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." (Ps 24:1-2) So profound was this notion of God's "ownership" and the people's dependence, that it even governed land rights. Leviticus said, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants." Even economics was rooted in the graciousness of the covenant God.

The sense of the sovereignty of God and our relationship to God — and consequently to one another and all of creation — is at the absolute center of Jubilee. Let the land lie fallow — that earth, out there, so to speak and this earth, the earth that is me. Such is the condition of wondering appreciation of God and of the profound rest that is recreative of ourselves, our dreams, our energies.

Jubilee embraces and builds on the notion of Sabbath. (The word from the Jewish Scriptures will be retained here.) Unfortunately the sense of Sabbath has been lost or weakened for many of us. Perhaps some of that was due to a legalism about "servile work." Some has been lost to the necessities of commerce. What has been lost are rhythmic moments in time that take us "out of time" so we can be and can live more deeply.

Sabbath time allows us to recapture deeper moments of connection — with God, in our own being, with those around, with our earth. Sabbath time allows us to rest and enter depth — to appreciate and thank — to dream and to live differently. That Sabbath might be the extended thought and prayer of a weekend retreat. That Sabbath might be the joy of a Sunday Eucharist followed by a leisurely breakfast. That Sabbath could be an "island of quiet," moments gathered in the rush of life where you climb up out of the swirling waters, rest awhile, look around, catch your breath, share a hug with God, and plunge back into the day's churning waters. Sabbath is a chosen rhythm, a discipline with a marvelous promise. Rabbi Abraham Heschel

describes Sabbath as "like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date but an atmosphere." Here is what you find if you move into that "palace."

Rest and depth
of relationship

Life's hurry often makes us brush by one another and become strangers to our own depths. There is so much to do — and there is. Our involvement with things, productivity, goals is good, necessary. The ceaseless cycle of household activities will not go away — and it too is good. It is part of extending God's creative work. But it is only part, because God's creative work includes me in my depths. Time is for shared presence. And when we rest, become still, we are able to sense the Creative Presence in our midst.

The heart of Sabbath is to settle into that Creative Presence, that nearby God, the mysterious loving one who is closer to me than I am to myself (St. Augustine), who is closer to me than my own pulse (the Koran). There I am to receive a gracious creation from a gracious Creator. It is a prescription for peace, a journey to joy, a launching pad for love.

And it is inevitably a pathway to a deeper meeting with you, with whatever "you" shares existence with me. Sabbath is an invitation to be in time together, to be more attentively and creatively present to those who are near me. Listen to a precious Little Sabbath story from Abraham Heschel:

"I do not know what went on in his (Rabbi Ehimelech's) room, because I worked as one of the maids in the kitchen of his house. Only one thing I can tell you. During the week the maids would quarrel often with one another, as is common. But, week after week, on Friday when the Sabbath was about to arrive, the spirit in the kitchen was like the spirit on the eve of the



Day of Atonement. Every body would be overcome with an urge to ask forgiveness of each other. We were all seized by a feeling of affection and inner peace."

Sabbath also invites me to a deeper presence in, and care for, all of creation. Our practice has often been guided by the "subdue the earth" of the story in Genesis 1. But if you try to subdue anything, you always face the possibility of rebellion. If you do not reverence in the rhythms of a being, it will become ill and turn on you. So Sabbath asks us to look with gratitude and gentleness on our earth so it can be the Creator's garden. Sabbath invites to ecological thoughtfulness and care.

Gratitude and adoration

A hurried life can kill appreciation. And without appreciation there can be no wonder, no delight, no gratitude, no adoration. Sabbath calls you — and gives you permission — to slow down, to step out of push-pull cycles and pressure to enter joy. "Come let us sing to the Lord... let us approach him with praise and thanksgiving... let us bow down and worship..." (Ps 95) Sabbath is both the soil for and the song of a grateful heart.

Gratitude can be learned. For many, at least initially, it is a discipline as much as a two-mile walk or run each day. You need sustained attention and effort to become a person who breathes gratitude and lives adoration. But the promise it holds out for you! "A glad heart lights up the face ... and ... the lighthearted person has a continual feast." (Prv 15:13, 15)

Richard Foster, in *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, writes of five stepping stones to this life of Sabbath joy and praise.

1. Pay attention and enjoy the gifts around you. Really see the first snow-drops pushing through a still snow-streaked path

of garden... Really feel the warmth of the almost-spring sun... Really listen, ears and heart, to the beauty of a child's bubbling, uncontrollable laughter. Just enjoy.

2. Go to your "grateful center." This is a place (or perhaps situation or relationship) where you experience or experienced life's graciousness. It's "a time and place where we were free of all the grasping and grabbing, all the pushing and shoving, all the disapproving and dissenting." It could be a favorite corner in your home, a winding path through a pine forest, the security of someone you could always count on. It is a place of rest, trust, promise. When we go there — in fact or through memory and imagination — we reconnect with a sense of graciousness. It is renewed energy for the labors of life.

3. Practice. Work at savoring life's gifts. Cultivate a positive outlook. Foster lays out a challenge: "Try to live one entire day in utter thanksgiving. Balance every complaint with ten gratitudes, every criticism with ten compliments."

4. Magnify — make larger. You cannot go too far in appreciating God. You could never say too much about God's goodness. Let your heart be stretched. If you want to do this, discover the Psalms. Live in them. They will expand your heart and give you words.

5. "The final stepping-stone I want to mention," writes Foster, "is joyous, hilarious, foot-stomping celebration. We clap, laugh, shout, sing, dance." The exact form or expression is not the issue; what counts is the inner capacity and desire and drive. "Approach the Lord with praise and thanksgiving."

Conclusion

"Let the land lie fallow" and "Sabbath" have one more quality, a call to recreation and to re-creation. In the vision of Jubilee, the world is to be repaired, renewed. Jesus, echoing Jubilee spirituality, began his ministry "bringing good tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, proclaiming a year acceptable to the Lord." (Lk 4:18-19) What a dream! What a desire!

The Diocese of Rochester expresses its vision of Jubilee repair and renewal in these four primary themes: letting the land lie fallow, restoring right relationships, forgiveness and reconciliation, and eucharistic celebration. Other articles in the *Courier* series will deal with the latter three.

It is a mighty task to take on repairing the world. In the unified vision of Jubilee, fallow land is the starting place. In our Sabbath, in our stepping back from what we do to rest in whom we love, we create a receptive space for the gifts of a new way of seeing a new heart for loving a new energy for the world's re-creation.

Jubilee reflection questions:
"Let the Land Lie Fallow"

The diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis has provided the following reflection starters.

- "It is good soul-care not to wear yourself out." How do you care for your soul, your spiritual inner being?
- Do you give your soul time to lie fallow, that is, to discover the richness of God's gifts?
- Where are your Sabbath times?
- How can you extend the "islands of quiet" in your own life?
- What gifts surround you? How can you savor them?
- Where is your "grateful center"? Can you spend more time there this week?
- Where have you prayed the Psalms? What is your favorite Psalm?
- What magnifies your appreciation of life?
- Could this be a personal resolution: to make more time this week, this month, this year to make room for Sabbath moments in my life?

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