



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, August 25, 2019 7:00 am: Paying attention to God

Years ago in Hilo when I did a weekly bible study on this morning's Gospel passage with my parishioners, I had a meeting to go to in Kona and so I asked the group to lead themselves in a discussion and I wrote out this statement that I found in *Feasting on the Word*, my well-worn biblical commentary, and then I wrote out a question. It was like a homework assignment and when the group arrived, they found a piece of paper that said:

Statement: The Lord rests from the work of creation and consecrates the Sabbath. It is a day set aside to focus on the practice of holiness and to undertake holy work.

Question: So did Jesus break the rule or honor the Sabbath when he healed the woman in the synagogue? Please say why you feel the way you do.

If I were to answer the question myself, I would say that Jesus honored the Sabbath in the Gospel this morning and in no way violated it. Again, it is a day set aside to focus on the practice of holiness and to undertake holy work. That's what Jesus did.

I think that maybe the assumption here is that we are to sit, rest, and pray on our Sabbath and I think that's part of it, but if we were called to spend time in prayer, we really have to ponder the question: *What is prayer?*

Many years ago I found a definition of prayer that says this: *Prayer is paying attention to God as part of our life.*

So when I drive down the road and marvel at the trees and the mountains and the ocean, I'm paying attention to God as a part of my life and I am in prayer. I'm acknowledging and integrating into God's creation.

And Jesus acknowledged and integrated into God's creation when he looked out with compassion upon that poor woman and healed her. And he was paying attention to God as part of his life (and her life as well) and so he was praying and working on holy things, so how could he have broken the Sabbath?

Having said all this, I've been warned by more than one bishop and senior warden that I need to take time off and rest, and I often tell many of you that I believe Sabbath is a biblical concept, pointing out that Jesus often went to the other side of Lake Galilee in a boat to get away from the crowd so that he could rest.

And I think Sabbath is a very important concept that I try to work into my daily life, especially in the morning, taking time to do what I call "having a cup of coffee with God" where I sit on my lanai and look out a Punchbowl Crater as the sunrise casts its light upon the city.

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And I do that kind of thing so that I am rested enough to be able to engage in prayer in the form of holy works – writing sermons, answering emails and phone calls, supervising staff, looking at numbers, sitting on boards, planning retreats, preparing for worship, and the list goes on and on. And that's all good and smooth and easy when I pay attention to God as a part of my life. And if I don't, then I seem to fall short.

Things are smooth and easy when I bring God into the process. Things get done in ways that I can't do if I'm running it on my own timetable and according to my own plan. I find I need to get out of God's way and when I do that, there are Sunday afternoons after church when I go home after having done four services in less than 24 hours and I take a 20-minute nap and then do a sermon – all between three and 5 o'clock, but that's because I'm in the groove because I've prayed and because I've gotten rest.

Versus other times, where doing things like answering emails can take five hours, because I fret and wring my hands about all the things that I feel I have to do, which then leads to procrastination and frustration, because God has been eased out of the process. If I take a deep breath and close my eyes for a few seconds, then the emails get answered. But I often forget. I'm only human after all.

So when Jesus sees the woman while he's in the synagogue and reaches out to heal her, Jesus is just Jesus-ing. That's who he is. That's what he does. He embodies compassion, and that is a prayer (if we truly believe that prayer is action).

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So how do we bring prayer to the entirety of our lives today? I think the answer to that is to be mindful and aware of what we're doing and why we're doing it. For example, when the Altar Guild sets the altar, it's not just about putting things in the right place—it's about feeling the weight of the chalice as they place it on the altar, smoothing out the linen and seeing how it feels against their hands, and seeing themselves as part of a larger process in honoring and worshipping the God they love. And when I do a sermon, it's not just preparing a talk but it's thinking about why I'm doing what I'm doing, getting in the groove of what the words in the Bible say and mean, trying to tie it all in to our lives today, and thinking about you and how it all gives glory to God. Again, it's about mindfulness.

And when we're mindful of the smaller things, we're open to becoming more mindful of the bigger things. We notice the homeless person walking by as we walk down Alakea or Bishop Street and who needs our prayers, because those prayers may do something like lead us to action and we find ourselves on a Sunday afternoon making sandwiches in Davies Hall and then delivering them to people in the streets. Or we drive down Beretania Street past the State Capitol and see the political signs and we pause to say a prayer for our county, our state, and our country and that may actually motivate us to pray ourselves into the action of going out to vote—or at least I hope it does.

Paying attention to God as part of our lives and making our entire lives a Sabbath and a prayer—that's what God really wants from us and when we live into that call and we succeed, the reward is great, because we feel calm and centered because we've entered into the world of God's will and God's presence.

And my prayer for this morning is that this Eucharist will help us to that end. So come to the table, take in the presence, and pay attention to God as part of your life.

Amen.