

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 1 of 6

One of the healing stories – one of many -
and one of those encounters between Jesus, the teacher and healer, and organized religion.

The synagogue leader's main concern is that things be done properly and in order.

It reminds me when I was at the Presbyterian seminary in Austin, Texas
where most of the students as you might expect were Presbyterian.

But, there were also several United Methodist students.

The Presbyterians always wanted things to be done properly and in order.

We Methodists were not so concerned about order, because – ah -
tomorrow was another day, and after all, our goal is going on to perfection -
recalling John Wesley's statement.

We bantered that around continuously and enjoyed one another in the process.

There was some of this going on that day in the synagogue -
although it was not in jest.

The leader of the synagogue was outraged, and so was Jesus.

Fortunately, the woman who was healed and her friends were very pleased.

I see a couple of things I want to share with you.

This kind of story sets up a conflict –
and we often address that conflict when we examine these stories.

I don't want to do that as much as I want to gaze into the story
(to recall the image that was already a part of the story).

One, is to learn more about Sabbath. And two,
is to get a glimpse at what happens in the healing encounter.

This woman had lived her life having to look down
because of a disease or deformity in her back.

How does something happen when Jesus gazes into her eyes?

How might we better understand this?

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 2 of 6

The first thing – the Sabbath. The synagogue leader tells Jesus that healings can happen on the other six days of the week. But not on this day
Jesus points out after he was rebuked,
”Do not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox and ass and lead them away to water?”

He points out that the commandment goes on to include the sons,
servants, cattle, even strangers in town.

The Sabbath is to include the servants and beasts of burden. It is a time for all to relax.

The Sabbath is supposed to be a day of rest,
not just personally but for the community.

We all know this.

So let’s go further.

I like the way Abraham Heschel teaches about the Sabbath.¹

Heschel is one of the most significant Jewish theologians of the 20th century.

He was a social activist when many of his colleagues

both Christian and Jewish preferred to stay within the walls of academia.

You will see him striding alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. in the protest march at Selma, AL.

He was professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism

at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1945 to 1972. He argued

that the religious experience is a fundamentally human impulse,

Not a Jewish one, and that no religious community can claim a monopoly on the truth.

Let’s look at what he wrote about Sabbath.

He wrote that the Sabbath is really a time when you change what you are doing,

take a break from what you are doing – whatever it is.

If you wear a watch the rest of the week, take it off for the Sabbath.

If you work the other days of the week, don’t work on the Sabbath.

Do something different - take a break from your activities and perceptions –

so you can be open to new ones.

There was some very rich material from Abraham Heschel.

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 3 of 6

I also want to consider thoughts about Sabbath that come from another writer whose name is Glenda Green – not a professional theologian but a portrait painter – very accomplished in her field. She came to mind because her work just seems to shine on what we have going on in our scripture reading today.² She writes that the Sabbath is a day of grace that follows six days of work, or creation.

She calls it a rest from *structure*.

Structure is not necessarily physical structure like this building although it is that.

It is also the administration and organization and regulation of things – even in our minds.

The Sabbath is a rest from *structure*, because *structure* is labor.

The Sabbath is therefore a rest from the labor of *structure*.

These two writers are saying similar things.

Green is bringing us the insight that the Sabbath is not only a change from whatever we are doing - but it is part of a kind of a divine rhythm – a sequence.

She calls it part of a “melody of divine order.”

She suggests we might consider it a higher intelligence – an intelligence of respect for creation - respect for the creator – all of life - and all those things manifested in creation.

Again, a universal rhythm – that she calls a melody of divine order.

This melody is played out in a rhythm of six beats and a pause, six points and a center, six actions and one rest, and so on.

There is a resting interval – to be savored – to be experienced.

Remember the moment the orchestra ceases to play – that artistic moment?

How many of you heard the Mahler Sixth symphony a few weeks ago?

Remember the moment after the final notes were played?

Before even the violins were released to rest – that artistic moment?

They happen between movements as well as at the end of performances of fine music.

I especially remember the ending of this symphony this summer in the music tent.

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 4 of 6

It was an almost breathtaking moment – a speechless moment -
like being held above it all for just a moment.

No one moves – we have no words for a moment like that.

A kind of Sabbath moment – it would not have happened if the orchestra
finished their final note and stood up to receive applause - a Sabbath moment.
That pause was within the structure, but it was not structure. It was a rest from structure.

It was a resting cadence. Green calls it a divine moment,
and she also calls it *love*. She is always calling us to be the love that we are.

Sabbath time is a different kind of time
that can be missed if we don't open ourselves to some divine timing
and in those moments let ourselves
be the love that we are.

Perhaps it is something built into the universe –
a divine timing – a cadence – a resting interval -
maybe even something of that illusive “unified field theory”

Albert Einstein kept searching for
(for those of us who are reading Walter Isaacson's new book).
And, perhaps it is what we look for in finding our own healing
from the violence and conflict of life – the brutal scars of experience –
the missed cues and misunderstandings

that accompany our personal and communal lives sometimes -

These things may cause us to live our lives looking down
in sadness, shame, or boredom.

Glenda Green would tell us that love is the space we call Sabbath.

Love is the healing energy of creation that appears in the resting interval.

It is a time to let our eyes be directed elsewhere from where they are directed all week.

Perhaps it is a divine gaze – and therein lies the surprise.

I will close with a story, and it goes like this:

There was a certain man who went through the forest

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 5 of 6

seeking any bird of interest he might find.

He caught a young eagle, brought it home and put it among the fowls and ducks and turkeys.

He gave it chicken food to eat - even though it was the king of birds.

Five years later, a naturalist came to visit, and

after passing through the garden, said, "That bird is an eagle, not a chicken."

"Yes," said the owner, "but I have trained it to be a chicken. It is no longer an eagle."

"No," said the naturalist, "It is an Eagle still; it has the heart of an Eagle, it has the wing span of an eagle, and I will help it soar high up into the heavens."

"No," said the owner. "It is a chicken and will never fly."

They agreed to test it. The naturalist picked up the Eagle, held it up and said with great intensity.

"Eagle, you are an eagle, you belong to the sky and not to the earth;
stretch forth your wings and fly."

The eagle turned this way and that, and then looking down, saw the chickens eating their food, and jumped down.

The owner said, "I told you it was a chicken."

"No," said the naturalist, "It is an eagle. Give it another chance tomorrow."

So the next day he took it to the top of the house and said:

"Eagle, you are an eagle; stretch forth your wings and fly."

But again the eagle, seeing the chickens feeding, jumped down and ate with them.

And the owner said, "I told you it was a chicken."

"No," asserted the naturalist, "It is an eagle, and it has the heart of an eagle;

Only give it one more chance, and tomorrow it will fly."

The next morning he rose early and took the eagle outside the city and away from the houses, to the foot of a high mountain. The sun was just rising, gilding the top of the mountain with gold, and every crag was glistening in the joy of the beautiful morning.

Hi picked up the eagle and said to it: "Eagle, you are an eagle.

You belong to the sky and not to the earth; stretch your wings and fly."

The eagle looked around and trembled
as if new life were coming to it, but it did not fly.

A Sabbath Surprise – based on Luke 13:10-17
Aspen Community UMC
August 26, 2007

Page 6 of 6

The naturalist then placed his hand on its head
and caused it look straight into the sun.

Suddenly it stretched out its wings and, with the screech of an eagle,
flew out of his hands and mounted higher and higher and never returned.³

Is this story anything like our reading for today? For it reminds us
that in the course of busy lives its easy to forget – or perhaps never learn

That there is a marvelous creative energy – that wants to gaze
into our eyes – and lift our heads upward –

and remind us at least once a week

that surprising healing moments are built into the nature of things
especially on the Sabbath.

So, Luke tells the story of the woman
who was healed after years of having to look down because of her infirmity -
healed on the Sabbath, no less.

Theologians and artists share their insights about the nature of Sabbath –
from both scholarly and mystical sources.

Even the storytellers capture it in their own images.

And the music we hear bears witness to it.

And you and I –
we can enjoy the surprises that wait for us in the resting interval of the Sabbath
- when we slow down enough to meet the divine gaze.

So, go out and do something different, change your perspective,
cease the usual, and make a space for the unusual.

Amen.

¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*

² Glenda Green. *Love Without End: Jesus Speaks*

³ Unknown