

Church of the Crossroads  
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 26, 2007  
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## THE EIGHTH DAY

Isaiah 58:9b-14  
Luke 13:10-17

The ancient story goes that on the First Day of Creation, God said, “Let there be light; and there was light.” On the Sixth Day of Creation, God said, “Let us make humankind in our image . . . and it was so. God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.” On the Seventh Day of Creation, “God finished the work God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. . . .”

Thoughtful theologians have added an eighth day to the days of creation. Some have referred to the eighth day as the day of resurrection when in Christ new life came from death. Some have referred to the eighth day as the day when the gift of the Spirit was given to the church at Pentecost.

There is yet another way to think of the eighth day of creation. It can be any day, perhaps even today, when something is done to uphold the integrity of that first creation, when something is done to restore the creation to its original blessing and goodness (as Matthew Fox would put it), when something is done to restore human beings to their essential dignity and health and wholeness.

That “something” is most essentially done by God. That is the truth of the Sabbath. The Day of Sabbath is a day when we put away our tools and cease from all our interventions and allow the creation, including the human community, to be renewed and restored by the grace of God. And yet, we are not completely left out of the picture. As the Gospel story for today reminds us, the Sabbath Day is also a day when we can do our part in allowing healing and wholeness to find their way into the lives of human beings and into the life of the earth itself. This is the proper work of Sabbath, and this is why on a Sabbath Day Jesus needed to respond to the woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. Against the objections of the leader of the synagogue who declared that this act of healing was in violation of the rules of the Sabbath, Jesus said that surely the

Sabbath was a day for those in bondage to be set free. The work of the Sabbath is the work of restorative justice.

It is also interesting how the prophet Isaiah juxtaposes the honoring of the Sabbath with task of removing the yoke from among us and pointing the finger and speaking of evil, and also the work of offering food to the hungry and satisfying the needs of the afflicted. The proper work of the Sabbath is to refrain from pursuing our own interests and attending instead to the needs of others, and we could well add, the needs of the creation itself.

I like to think of the Eighth Day of Creation as any day when the proper work of the Sabbath is nurtured and fulfilled. The work of Sabbath is to inform all our days, and each and every day this work is done becomes an eighth day of creation, a day when the goodness and integrity of creation is upheld, and the common good of humankind is served.

On my summer travels, I experienced the kind of renewal and restoration that belongs to the eighth day. Whether it was deepening or simply cherishing my relationship with my son Iain as we made our way through the North Country of British Columbia, or coming very close to a grizzly bear, or spending hour upon hour contemplating the northern skies, especially at the close of day, or being surrounded by mountains and glaciers, or fishing in pristine rivers, or being filled with wonder over a perfect reflection of trees in the green waters of a lake, or receiving hospitality from our host family who live in a log house in Terrace, British Columbia, eighth days abounded. I also witnessed the work of past eighth days accomplished by others. In Vancouver, many, many street signs (I think nearly half) include the symbol of a bicycle. That means that streets have been set aside for cyclists. These streets have no stop signs. Instead, automobile traffic is slowed by roundabouts that are found in the middle of every intersection. What incredible imagination and city planning! Everyone in Vancouver seems to walk or ride bicycles. Everyone seems to compost their waste. There is no freeway running through Vancouver proper. And, of course, everyone is covered by health insurance, and same-sex marriage is a fact, and I could go on. Eighth days of creation are in evidence everywhere.

The work of the new creation, which is the Sabbath work of each and every eighth day, is both personal and social. The prophet Isaiah and Jesus himself make no distinction between the restorative work done by individual human beings and human beings working together for the common good of humankind and the whole of creation. The Eighth Day of Creation does not allow us to retreat from our social or ecological responsibility.

It is a sign of God's grace that there are times when a modest human gesture of kindness and care can have ever widening consequences. A reading shared by Barbara Grace Ripple and others this week reflects this truth. I know that many of you received it, but some have not, and my inner voice has said that the reading most essentially celebrates the eighth day of creation, its task and promise. And so I would like to end this sermon with the reading. It is called "Wandering Around an Albuquerque Airport Terminal" and is written by Naomi Shihab Nye, an American poet of Palestinian background.

After learning my flight was detained 4 hours, I heard the announcement:

If anyone in the vicinity of gate 4-A understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.

Well—one pauses these Days. Gate 4-A was my own gate. I went there. An older woman in full traditional Palestinian dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly.

Help, said the flight service person.

Talk to her.

What was her problem? We told her the flight was going to be four hours late and she did this.

I put my arm around her and spoke to her haltingly.

Shu dow-a, shu-biduck habibti, stani stani schway, min fadlick, sho bit se-wee?

The minute she heard my words she knew—however poorly used—she stopped crying. She thought our flight had been cancelled entirely.

She needed to be in El Paso for some major medical treatment the following day.

I said no, no, we're fine, you'll get there, just late, who is picking you up?

Let's call him and tell him. We called her son and I spoke with him in English.

I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and would ride next to her.

She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought

just for the heck of it why not call come Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her.

This all took up about 2 hours. She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life. Answering questions.

She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—out of her bag and was offering them to all the women at the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one.

It was like a sacrament.

The traveler from Argentina, the traveler from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling.

There are no better cookies.

And then the airline broke out the free beverages from huge coolers—non-alcoholic—and the two little girls for our flight, one African-American, one Mexican-American—ran around serving us all apple juice and lemonade and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves.

Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant.

Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in. The shared world.

Not a single person in this gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—has seemed apprehensive about any other person.

They took the cookies.

I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen, anywhere.

Not everything is lost.

I can only add. This is the work of Sabbath. This is the continuing work of each and every Eighth Day, which is every day, really. This is the continuing unfolding of the new creation to which God calls us, and to which we, by the grace of God, will respond faithfully. Thanks be to God. Amen.