

Sabbath Obedience

June 20, 2010

Rev. Ken Heintzelman

One day a husband and wife were discussing whose job it was to get up first and fix the morning coffee. The husband said, "The scriptures say it's the wife's responsibility and she should obey". The wife disagreed and said, "I can show you in the Bible where it definitely says it's your responsibility." The husband replied, "If you can show me that in the Bible, I'll be glad to do it." She opened up the Bible and pointed down, he looked and clearly read "He-brews".

When you hear the word, "obedience" what do you think of?

I am operating on an assumption about life and the way we are as human beings. I believe there is a rhythm to life that our lives may not be following. The rhythm of Life, that is Life with a capital "L", is one which beats for us, not against us. The rhythm of Life beats in such a way as to feed our spirits and to move us to dance with all of creation, to dance in partnership with all people of goodwill. The rhythm of Life beats in the most loving dance of coming together and going apart. The rhythm of Life compliments the needs of our spirits and in so far as we listen and bend our lives to the rhythm of Life we will have peace and we will have joy.

There is a rhythm to our lives, that is lives with a small "l". For most of us it is a rhythm that is dictated by societal structures and demands of our own creation. For many families it feels like a frantic ride that provides little joy and I propose we call the ride, "the Scrambler". The question is not whether or not there is a rhythm to our lives but rather what rhythm do we surrender to, what is the source, and is it the right rhythm for us and our families. The same questions can be asked of us as a congregation. What life rhythm do we obey?

There is a saying from our ancient wisdom tradition that goes, "God causes the sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain to fall on the just and the unjust". This saying is about the love of God and indicates to me that the underlying structure of life is love and the overarching arrangement of reality is love. Does the rhythm of our lives and the rhythm of Shadow Rock follow the rhythm of Life (with a capital "L"), which is Love?

It is here that I want to make my case for obedience. I think there are some important meanings and nuances that can help us understand some dimensions of Sabbath Rhythm and enrich our spiritual journey.

There are other drummers who are beating out rhythms that work against our spirits and diminish our lives. We know this is true. We know better. We sense better. Even if we do not know before we get on the "Scrambler", we certainly know after we have been on the ride for a while. Getting off the ride requires listening and being obedient to that inner voice of our spirit which knows better.

In concrete every day terms it might mean defiance to the social structures that we have allowed to inform the current rhythm of our lives. Defiance might mean fewer cars or cheaper cars. It might mean fewer vacations or a smaller home. It might mean public education rather than private education. It might mean 1 to 1 ½ incomes instead of two incomes. It might mean a complete change from a job to a vocation. It might mean getting outside our selves and our self interests for a while and serve the interests of the most vulnerable people in our society. These and many more “exits” off the ride are possible entrances to the rhythm that gives life. This opportunity exists every moment of our lives but the idea of Sabbath highlights our opportunity for now.

Paying attention and obeying that which is in us, all around us, and most life giving for us and all people is an obedience that gives us the greatest freedom. One of our church’s foundational theologians, Paul Tillich, uses the traditional words of sin and grace to speak about some deep aspects of human existence. He invites us to see “sin” as separation from our true selves, others, and God. It is not primarily a moral judgment. It is primarily an observation of the human condition; separation and estrangement. I would add to the list our estrangement from the Rhythm of Life and the Love that holds all of life together.

This is the truth of our lives but it is only half the truth. We can take responsibility for the quality of our lives and the destiny of our lives. We can make different decisions and make a difference, today. This is true for us as individuals, families, congregation, and a human society.

The prophetic voice of our faith tradition challenges us on every level of existence.

Every time we go to war, pushed by us or pulled by others, we sense its wrongness but we do not obey the rhythm of Life.

For decades presidents and environmental wackos have called us to reduce our energy consumption and develop new energy sources. We sensed the rightness of it but we ignored it and now our gulf coast and many other places in the world are wounded. We did not listen to the rhythm of Life.

For the sake of their people, their economy, and their energy needs the Chinese government is moving a large percentage of their military spending away from their army to their navy and air force so as to project power to serve their national interests. Their concern is as much about power as it is about food for their people. Do we hear the rhythm of Life and are we obeying or will we let our fear let drummers of fear and death drown out our better responses.

There is a rhythm that is most life giving underlying all of creation and able to give shape to every challenge we face; education, budget deficits, immigration, health care, etc. We have the wisdom, the courage, the perseverance, the minds, hearts, and urgency to listen and obey.

There is something to be said about obeying the rhythm of life that feeds our spirits.

Obedience by Sietze Buning

Were my parents right or wrong not to mow the ripe oats that Sunday morning with the rainstorm threatening?

I reminded them that the Sabbath was made for man and of the ox fallen into the pit.
Without an oats crop, I argued,
The cattle would need to survive on town-bought oats
And then it wouldn't pay to keep them.
Isn't selling cattle at a loss like an ox in a pit?

My parents did not argue.
We went to church.
We sang the usual psalms louder than usual---
We, and the others whose harvests were at stake:

“Jerusalem, where blessing waits,
Our feet are standing in thy gates.”

“God, be merciful to me;
On thy grace I rest my plea.”

Dominie's spur-of-the-moment concession:
“He rides o the clouds, the wings of the storm;
The lightening and the wind his missions perform.”

Dominie made no concessions on sermon length:
“Five Good Reasons for Infant Baptism,”
Though we heard little of it,

For more floods came and more winds blew and beat
Upon that House than we had figured on, even,
More lightening and thunder
And hail the size of pullet eggs.
Falling branches snapped the electric wires.
We sang the closing psalm without the organ and in the dark:

“Ye seed from Abraham descended,
God's covenant love is never ended.”

Afterward we rode by our oat field,
Flattened.

“We will still mow it,” Dad said.
“Ten bushels to the acre, maybe, what would have been fifty
If I had mowed right after milking
And if the whole family had shocked.
We could have had it weatherproof before the storm.”

Later at dinner Dad said,
“God was testing us. I’m glad we went.”
“Those psalms never gave me such a lift as this morning,”
Mother said, “I wouldn’t have missed it.”
And even I though but did not say,
How guilty we would feel now if we had saved the harvest.

The one time Dad asked me why I live in a Black neighborhood,
I reminded him of that Sunday morning.
Immediately he understood.

Obeying that which is in us, all around us, and most life giving for us and all people is an
obedience that gives us the greatest freedom. Amen.

Next week, in this same spirit, we will lighten up with a feast of slow food for our bodies
and our souls.