

Every Friday, sometime in the late afternoon, early evening, before the sun sets, Casper Ter Kuile, author, theologian, podcaster, and prolific twitter user posts the same tweet.

The work isn't done, but it is time to stop.

<https://twitter.com/caspertk/status/1403438666471591941>

And then there is complete Social Media silence until around the same time on Saturday.

Ter Kuile engages in a committed practice of tech Sabbath.

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28581/the-power-of-ritual>

...twenty-four hours of not using my laptop or phone from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. No email, no social media, no nothing. As darkness comes, I stand in front of my window and watch the sky for a few moments. Then I light a candle, and while holding it, I sing a song I learned in childhood to enter the magical and mysterious sabbath time. The moment I put the candle back on the table I can feel it: my shoulders relax, my breath comes easier, and usually, the tiredness that I've been able to hold off catches up with me, and I'm in bed by nine o'clock. If I'm really feeling it, I'll light incense. Without my tech, there's no music or podcasts to listen to, so I'm in silence, often for the first time in days. I am suddenly given the opportunity (or forced, depending on the day) to look inward.

I wonder if that sounds to you inviting, horrifying, or perhaps a bit of both?

Our two readings today revolve around Sabbath.

The seventh day.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to Adonai, to the Eternal, you shall not do any work.

I want to explore the idea of Sabbath, as a practice, but more so as a deep teaching about how we engage with our world.

On this Sunday in particular we might also ponder how its ethical/spiritual basis might frame how we understand a Christian informed posture amid PRIDE Month and National Indigenous History Month.

In our reading from the Christian Scriptures, Jesus is pictured in controversy with the religious authorities of his community, Galilee in the north, about Sabbath keeping, about what one is and isn't allowed to do.

These confrontations are tragically re-framed in many Christian circles as Jesus competing with Judaism, in and of itself, eventually to create a new religion which supersedes the old.

This is where I have taken to speak of Jesus as Yeshua ben Myriam (Jesus, child of Mary), a Hebrew and Jewish naming to keep Jesus' Jewishness present in our thinking.

I'd suggest that Jesus is offering a counter interpretation within his religious framework as would be so common for different Rabbi's/teachers.

We could say more, about this, but what I'd like to emphasize is how Jesus sums up his argument.

The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath

We'll come back to that.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scripture, from the second book of Moses, also called *Exodus* is an important Sabbath reading and teaching.

What's significant is that in the narrative, this reading occurs before Sinai.

Sinai is the moment in which the women, children, men, and all the people of Israel, are given, Torah, Commandments, Law, Teaching from the Eternal.

More commonly called the 10 Commandments (which is a bit reductive to say the least).

That's where the phrase I quoted before emerges, to *remember the sabbath day and keep it holy*.

But this passage comes much earlier in the narrative, and what it does is point to the idea that Sabbath is a lot more than a day off, but a deeply embodied, shared ethical framework, and this is the first of many times in which Sabbath is offered up as this broad principle that undergirds Torah/the Teachings of the Israelite people.

It will be re-stated in many ways in the chapters to come.

There is what I read earlier.

But then the teaching to let a field lay fallow every 7th season to allow the land to rejuvenate.

There is the teaching that debt that accumulates be forgiven and wealth redistributed cyclically so that poverty shall not become intergenerational nor that extreme wealth be inherited.

There is the teaching that during harvest, that which is missed when picking or plowing, shall be left behind for those in the community who lack.

And it all begins with this moment of receiving bread while wandering in the desert.

The Hebrew reading comes during the time in which the women, children, men, and the whole people of Israel were living in the wilderness having been freed from slavery in Egypt.

But they are starving and desperate.

And so G-D promises to give bread from heaven.

The Eternal said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.

In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

This question of "test" frames G-D as a bit arbitrary, I wonder if perhaps this phrase might be best understood not as a strict test of obedience (because those terms are absent from the Ancient Hebrew lexicon, they are inserted by English translators) but instead about deep teaching.

It is worth remembering how we as modern readers approach these stories with modern questions.

Literalism.

Historicity.

And we approach them amidst centuries of Christian triumphalism – which religion is true?

But when we can recapture the mythic, the formative, we are on to something.

The teaching of the manna works like this.

Each day one gathers only what one needs.

Enough for the people in their tents (family, kinfolk).

One must not gather more than is needed for the day.

If one tries to stockpile and accumulate it will become moldy and worm-eaten.

On the day before the Sabbath, one gathers enough for two days.

The following day, back to the pattern.

Enough for one's needs.

No one goes without.

No accumulation.

If we can wrestle this out of a purely religious imagining, can we see in here a mythic foundation for an economic, environmental, and ethical framework?

One that is concerned with the basic needs of the whole community?

One that is concerned with the health of the land?

One that is concerned with the ruinous prospect of accumulative wealth and economic disparity?

This is Sabbath ethics. This is Sabbath economics.

That might help us better frame Jesus and these Pharisees, as a debate within a faith, not between competing faiths. A challenge that they may be keeping Sabbath, but a call to embrace the underlying ethic more deeply, more fully, more wholly.

We might see Jesus in line with Isaiah who offered a similar challenge, not to begin a new religion, but to deepen, and commit to the ethical justice implications:

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

In Christian community today, Sabbath keeping is sometimes relegated to discussions of self-care (which is good), or often about lamenting bygone days in which no one worked or shopped or played sports on Sunday.

It becomes a question of personal piety.

But I would argue instead it is about boundaries and restraint.

But not out of a puritanical self-denial.

But out of a wholehearted regard.

Out of soulful reverence.

The Sabbath teaching of Manna is one of recognizing with reverence, the sanctity, the blessedness, the goodness of the land, and from such a space, living in respect of limits, refusing to push beyond capacity, seeking harmony...even reconciliation.

Sabbath keeping as a personal practice of setting aside work then enters into a robust understanding of self-care and the value we place upon the human person.

The practice is not about arbitrary obedience, but shaping an imagination.

It is developing a recognition and reverence of the inherent worth of the human person, and from this, living it out by refusing to violate and exploit, to push beyond healthy limits.

For that which we are willing to do to the self we are too often willing to acquiesce onto another.

Sabbath ethics is about reverence and care.

Making space for flourishing of the human community and the more than human community.

That theme of space making, for the self and the soul and the other was the core of our Trinity Sunday reflection a few weeks ago.

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Sermon-May-30.pdf>

Vividly and profoundly demonstrated in the Haudenosaunee teaching of the Two Row Wampum.

This is where this Sabbath ethic-nomics becomes a very real question in this moment.

Pride Month.

National Indigenous History month.

Sabbath speaks to how we dance with regard, with beholding, with attending.

Do we nurture that of Spirit within us that leads us to recognize the Divine image in queerness, in trans people, in expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression such that we move past tolerance into reverence and recognition of divinity, sacredness?

From there we we resist tendencies to limit, control, or coerce.

A sabbath ethic of deep reverence and respect has no room for overt or subtle coercive conversion efforts – therapeutic, dogmatic, or through holding signs with thick sharpie on neon Bristol board!

A sabbath ethic witnesses to colonial past and present habits of space taking and erasure, not only as social sin but challenges us to recognize how this manifests within our own bodies and thought patterns in our bank accounts and property deeds.

This speaks to so many instances of violence, that which is physical, and that which is a violation of the sanctity of another, the imposing of power upon those with a lesser standing, forcing conformity, fearing and deriding difference, intimidating religious minorities, expecting assimilation, labeling that which is different as barbaric.

We are learning to speak of the deep shame, hurt and fear that dwells within so many hate filled ideologies, where the absence of a deep regard for self and soul is mirrored in a lack of empathy and understanding an inability to reach for connection in vulnerability.

If Sabbath is about holding the self, the soul, the other, and the earth in such joyful regard that we resist exerting dominance than we cannot in good conscience call the bygone days in which stores were closed on Sunday a true reflection of Sabbath, no more than Rabbi Yeshua could allow the Galilean religious elite to do so amidst the social stratification that impoverished his community.

The question I grapple with is if Sabbath reverence is at the core of our being

A knowing of each cell of its dignity

A genuine regard for the other

How do we nurture this?

On Thursday evening, Cecilia Rands shared from Laura Jean Truman's "A prayer for the tired, angry ones."

Grant us the humility of a decentered but Beloved self.

<https://www.sarahbessey.com/books/rhythm-of-prayer>

We are caught in a societal furor that glorifies busy-ness and productivity, how often do we push our even own bodies too far or feel guilty for not accomplishing enough?

There are contemporary prophets who call to us like Isaiah to cease our glorification of burnout.

To recognize this as a continuation of the exploitation of land and bodies that is endemic to our colonial roots.

I am not as good at Sabbath keeping as Casper Ter Kuile

(by the way, did you catch how that statement *not as good* even unwittingly plays right into that comparative/productive mental framework)

I have not yet found a practice of turning things off, my own anxiety to perform included, from one sundown to the next. I know that the hyperdrive that pushes past limits lives well within my cultured mind and body.

Yet I am working on it. Working with it.

And for the past several weeks, as I close my email around 5:30pm each day, and for the rest of the evening wrestle with the urge to press on the stylized envelop app on my phone.

I repeat to myself.

The work is not finished.

But it is time for me to stop.