

"Creation: The Seventh Day"

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

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Genesis 2:1-3

Let us Pray. Turn our eyes Lord, away from lesser distractions so that we might realize that we are in your presence, that we are your people, that you are with us. Speak a word to our hearts of assurance and of challenge. Open our hearts and minds and eyes, Oh God, so that we might see Jesus. Amen.

On the seventh day God had finished all the work that God had done. And on the seventh day God rested, of all things.

God takes a day off. What do you make of that? After six days of creating all that is, God takes a day off.

Now, you might think the story was written this way so that hard-working people can go to their bosses and say, "See, even God needed a day of rest." But it also may be that our spiritual ancestors in the faith who wrote this story of creation were trying to say something significant about who God is, and about what this world in which we find ourselves is like, and about who we are.

Have you ever had a job where you felt like you couldn't take a day off? Have you ever had a job where it felt like you couldn't take a vacation? I have. Oh, I took my days off and I took my vacation. Jane made me. But even on my days off I couldn't relax. Even on vacation I was distracted because I didn't really trust the systems to be able to operate without me being there to push them.

I once met with a pastor in a small rural community in central Pennsylvania. We had lunch and talked about his church and his plans for the future. After lunch he asked if I'd mind taking a walk with him. We walked for a few blocks and he asked if I would wait with him there for a few minutes. We stood there next to the train tracks for about five minutes chatting when a train came through town. After the train had passed he said to me, "I always like to come and watch the 2:10 train come through town. It's the only thing in this town I don't need to push to make it go."

I once served a church where we had started a social service agency that was housed in the basement of our church. After a while we spun it off - that is we created an independent board and let the social service agency run itself. Over a period of time the values of the agency began to change. They became different from our values in the church. The agency seemed sometimes to be more concerned about empire building than serving people. So I was always nervous when I went on vacation, and I always wanted to get back because I had this sinking feeling that if I was gone too long the agency would have done something like opened a McDonald's in our sacristy.

It is not good management, as I understand it, to run a business or a department or a organization in such a way that you can never take a day off. Good management is when you make sure that everyone who is a part of your organization understands what the organization's mission is. They have contributed to developing the mission. They understand the purpose and goals of the organization, and they understand the values and the standards that the organization is committed to.

When a manager has helped the organization develop a culture, and when everyone in the organization buys into the culture, then the manager is able to take a day off and the organization still knows why it's doing what it's doing, where it's going, and the values and commitments that it has made as to how it will do things in order to get there.

According to the story in Genesis, God created a world in which it would be possible for even God to take a day off. We, whose faith is shaped by the biblical story, aren't Deists. Deists believe that God created the world and then just sort of let it operate on its own. Descartes compared God to a clock maker who made a clock and wound it up and then just let it run on its own. We aren't Deists. Genesis says that God took a day off. It doesn't say that God took a powder. It doesn't say that God disappeared.

Neither are we, whose faith is shaped by the biblical story, pantheists. We don't believe that God makes every decision anew every day. We don't think that God says every day, "Well, should I have the sun rise this morning or not?" We don't think that God decides each evening which stars will shine and which won't.

We are not Deists who think that God created us and then left us to our own resources. Neither are we pantheists. We believe that God has created a world that has freedom, but that God continues to be passionately involved in it, praying for us, encouraging us, inspiring us.

A good manager teaches, encourages, inspires, praises, thanks, energizes, helps solve problems but also lets us make mistakes and learn from them and try again.

Sir John Polkinghorne is a particle physicist who is also an Anglican priest. In 1998 he delivered the Witherspoon Lecture. The theme was the relationship between God and nature.

Polkinghorne said that most of us were educated in a science shaped by the Enlightenment, when people assume that the world, the universe, all creation, was like a machine. Things happen as a result of clear and ultimately discernable causes. There is a cause which results in an effect, and the world is like a machine.

The science that most of us were taught was a science that allowed no room, really, for God, because everything had a natural explanation. Everything was understandable. If you only knew all the causes you could know all the effects.

But during the time in which we lived, Polkinghorne says, our understanding of the natural world has changed in two significant ways.

First, we now know that even the universe itself has a history. Beginning with the Big Bang, the universe itself is evolving. And there is room now in our understanding of the universe for purpose and meaning.

This was not part of science most of us were taught in school. Evolution, Polkinghorne says, far from being the enemy of religion, has opened room in our understanding of the world for God.

The second thing, he said, that has changed our understanding of the way the world works is the development of quantum physics and chaos theory. The way the world works is a lot more complex than the old idea of cause and effect. Science now, he says, not only allows room for, but needs, miracles and mystery in order to explain how it is that our world works.

Sir John says one more thing in his lecture. He says what we most need to remember is that God's purpose is not to fix our world but to save us. Finally, he says, God is our savior. What God wants is not just a transformed earth but transformed hearts.

It may be possible for God, if God so chose, to end war tomorrow. It may be possible for God to end disease tomorrow. It may be possible for God to correct injustice, to eradicate poverty and hunger tomorrow. But even if God were to do all those things, our hearts would not have been changed.

God wants to teach us how to love: to teach us how to love justice, how to love peace, and how to love each other.

God seeks to create a world such as even God can take a day off.

Of course, we shouldn't take all this too literally. Psalm 121 says that God doesn't take a day off. It says that the One who watches Israel doesn't slumber; the One who keeps us neither slumbers nor sleeps.

But God longs to be able to trust us. God longs to be able to trust us to love this creation which God has made.

May we listen for God's presence. May we let God speak to our hearts. May we become the people whom God can trust.