

## **In the Meantime: Sabbaths of Hope**

**Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21**

*Kingdom Come*

Almost everybody knows the first words of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created....” Who knows the last words of the Bible? Today’s text is the end of the New Testament, the last verses of the Christian apocalyptic called Revelation. This last book of the Bible is a vision, a glimpse of “what must soon take place” revealed to a man named John.

Revelation features a series of incredible events, of suffering, monsters, oppression, famine, war, and death. There is judgment with reward for the faithful who have come through great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. Then, at the end, “See, I am coming soon,” says the risen Christ -- so be ready!

There is reassurance: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The living Word that was present at the creation is present at the end of that creation and the birthing of the new creation. It was not the power of Rome— and no other power even to the Evil One and the kingdom of darkness – that would have the last word nor the first word. Summing up the message of Revelation, there was reward for those early Christians who endured the persecution and suffering. That reward was to be brought by Jesus, the risen Christ, who was coming soon.

There was fervent expectation of Jesus’ second coming in the first-century church. The apostle Paul wrote of it often. That hope enabled people endure great hardship. However, as far as we know, Jesus did not come back as expected, and has not to this day. When the second coming didn’t take place as expected, some changes happened. The church as an enduring institution was born.

The legacy of unrealized expectation is still with us today as apocalyptic hope became refocused into the far future and removed from its original context of Roman oppression. Many people in our own time expect or hope or at least pray for the second coming. Many people continue to be disappointed. So, how do we deal with significant disappointment, grief, even depression in our lives?

One way is not to deal with it at all. We can deny the reality of disappointment and grief – blame our troubles on someone else. That’s an option. We can find a scapegoat. We can blame ourselves -- how inadequate we are. If we do choose to deal with the disappointment, what does church offer our world here and now? Even if the long-anticipated coming of Jesus does take place at some point in the future, what do we need to be doing “in the meantime?”

The answer to the question, “What will we be doing in the meantime to deal with life’s disappointments -- from losing a job, a friend or a dream all the way to maybe no second coming of Jesus at all – is Sabbath. Sabbath is the biblical answer to “what do we do in the meantime?” That’s a curious answer and might seem a little disappointing.

Jewish Law and the fourth commandment tell us to Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” There were two reasons given for the Sabbath. God rested in the creation story. God rested and creation continued without God’s active involvement. The sky didn’t fall. If GOD could let go the need to control at least one day a week, maybe we can, too.

The second reason for keeping the Sabbath, and for it being holy, is that everyone – rich, poor, master, slave, powerful, powerless, lovable, despised, happy, and despairing – all are equal on the Sabbath. There are no efforts to gain competitive advantage in the

marketplace, to get ahead or to get back at anyone. One day a week, we all confess our common humanity.

Our society has a very hard time with Sabbath – separating innate value from accomplishments. We tend to assign human value by how much a person accomplishes, or by how much money, power, or prestige one acquires. These are not bad things, but our value as human beings is not earned. It is a gift from God. So, we struggle to keep Sabbath holy.

Sabbath faith offers us a way to deal with disappointments, grief, and depression in our lives. That very tangible hope comes in the good news brought by Jesus. Sabbath is the key.

John Lennon wrote, “life is just what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” We live *in the meantime* where and when life really does happen – when the plans we make produce results. In a theological sense, we live between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Saturday is our Sabbath. We live our lives between the cosmic poles of Good Friday, when the *powers that be* call the shots – and Easter Sunday when God births the new creation and hope is realized.

Hope in the promise of God’s new creation after this life can be very meaningful when we face death. According to Jesus, as we have his teaching reflected in the gospels and the New Testament, new creation refers to the quality of our lives now, in our world today. In the meantime does not minimize the importance of this life, how we live, how we live with each other, how we treat each other, and how we treat our planet.

There is an old spiritual -- “I’m just a poor, wayfaring pilgrim, passing through this world of woe.” The strong message of faith is that we’re not just passing through this world. This is our home. There is plenty of woe and pain, and plenty of joy. We have all the gifts we need to face all the challenges we face and to find abundance, that is the promise of the gospel.

Today, we are celebrating *Sabbaths of Hope*. We’re celebrating along with many other congregations in the Kansas City area. *Sabbaths of Hope* is a recognition of the prevalence of depression in our culture and that churches have something to offer in response. We celebrate because we can talk about depression openly, without stigma. We celebrate because treatment is readily available and there are information and resources even within this congregation to help.

**What is depression?** It is much more than feeling blue. Depression is a “persistent, sad, ‘empty’ mood that can be experienced as tension or anxiety. With depression, “Life lacks pleasure.” (Richard O’Connor). It has been called the “common cold of mental health problems because it’s so prevalent.”

Twenty million Americans, of all ages, have had or will have at least one episode of major depression in their lifetimes. The cost to society is \$44 billion, second only to cancer and roughly equal to heart disease and AIDS. And it’s getting worse with earlier onset and greater risk each successive generation.

Six million elderly persons have undiagnosed depression. Twenty-five percent of women suffer depression. Only 11.5% of men do, but that’s probably a low estimate. Men tend to act out more with substance abuse, violence, and other self-destructive behaviors. (statistics from *Sabbaths of Hope*)

Depression is a very real part of life *in the meantime*, part of the life of our congregations. It may be made worse by how we live. This congregation is responding in ways that can make it better.

- We pledge to be a place of acceptance. We say “come as you are” and we really mean it.
- We provide information through services of worship like today’s and referrals.
- We provide places to talk and places to pray

Words of hope are more than just optimism. They express the tangible hope that God’s new creation is already present in our lives. As we open ourselves to it, hope becomes more tangible.

We have the ability to challenge our society on many levels. One of these is our tendency, our need, to fix broken things and broken people. It is not always the person exhibiting symptoms who needs the attention.

The stresses that modern life often produce in sensitive and intelligent people are no longer considered to call for a change in society; it is the individual who is wrong [and who] ...consequently becomes a neurotic, not a revolutionary.”

(E. Knight, *The Objective Society*)

God calls us to lives of meaningful service, of creative and abundant living. Just calls us just as we are. We don’t have to become perfect first.

We talk very often as though the creative love of God could work through us only if we removed the fear and self-hatred, the pathological guilt, which stifle the freedom of love. [But there are countless stories of people who were less than whole and who] transformed the lives of those who came into their ambience.

(Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgment*)

Finally, we stand with our faith.

We believe not because our scars are magically wiped away, but because we see and feel love and enrichment poured into our emptiness from the acknowledged manifest poverty of another.

(Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgment*)

We accept the gift of abundance from the poverty of Jesus. Accepting that gift, we find deep resources in our own poverty, our own lack of wholeness. It was in my experience of grief in the loss of my mother that I clarified my call to ministry. It was in receiving the many offerings of support and comfort at that time, that I learned how to be with others in their grief. Accepting the brokenness in ourselves turns us to accept the brokenness of our neighbor. This “becomes part of what I can offer in intelligent compassion to the hurts of others. That is sanctity: the wholeness of giving the gift of all your self.” (Rowan Williams)

In the end, we pray:

Sacred One  
 teach us love,  
 compassion,  
 and honor  
 that we may  
 heal the earth  
 and heal each other.  
 Amen.