

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

About four years ago, after I had been here for about a year, I decided to change things just a little bit at our staff meetings. I decided to open up the staff meeting with a kind of first item on the agenda in which we would check in, we would tell each other what was going on in our lives, and hopefully that we could find a way to hold each other up in prayer as we worked together. That seemed to be a good idea. And it was, people began to reveal things about themselves and we began to see that we were working with whole people that had needs and wants and challenges and desires and hopes and dreams and fears.

But after about six months or so, we got tired of being so forthcoming with each other. We didn't really feel like going 100 feet deep early in the morning on a weekday. And so I decided to get experimental, I decided to ask some ice breaker questions. What do you hope for? What do you like about winter? What do you like about and look forward to in summer? Where do you see God? Questions like that, and for a while the spell was cast again and we were talking a little bit.

And then things kind of got a little bit tired this spring. And Meredith, my Executive Assistant, she said, can I try writing these questions? And I was really happy to let it go, right? And let someone else take it on.

And so Meredith, two weeks ago, had a question for the staff. What Disney character do you identify with the most? And initially I thought this was going to be like one of those things like a stone that skips the surface the entire meeting. But things began to shift as soon as Kellie Herdade, our youth minister, began to talk a little bit about the Disney character she identified with, which was Tinker Bell. And she said, I identify with Tinker Bell because I like to spread joy around like pixie dust, and I spend my time protecting lost boys.

And at that moment I was suddenly blown away because I realized all of the time and the incredible fruitfulness of Kellie's ministry among the young men of our parish was part of her attempt to protect lost boys. And I was touched. And then, Pastor Manisha said that she identified with Jasmine from the movie Aladdin because she was a woman of color, and it was the first time she had seen in a Disney film a woman of color who was a main character, an actor with her own desires and her own movement and her own agency. And this was incredibly important to her as a woman of color when she saw it as a younger woman. And this was, again, a moment of revelation.

And Sean, our sextant, he said that he related to Wall-E, the little robot from the movie Wall-E, who runs around and just picks up things and tries to hold this little junkyard together. And as soon as he said this, I kind of saw Sean as Wall-E. I could see that what he was trying to do is he was trying to kind of hold things together in a good-natured way. And to keep things from collapsing, and he was united by his love for Eve, just as Sean is kind of motivated by his love for his girlfriend.

And as things always do, it came to me. And I said that I identified with Peter Pan. Not because I refuse to grow up, some of you might suspect that. But as a specific moment in the Peter Pan franchise, if you will. It's from Steven Spielberg's movie Hook that was done in 1991.

And there's a – the play is one in which Peter has left Never Never Land and is living in the world that you and I know. And he's a businessman, and he's gotten incredibly distracted by the work that he has to do. And he's starting to neglect his family, and then, when he least suspects it, Hook comes into our world and steals his children away. And the only way for Peter to get his children back is to return to Never Never Land and to fight Hook. And in order to fight Hook, he has to learn to fly again.

And in order to learn to fly again, he has to learn to concentrate on something that makes him incredibly happy, on a joy. And he struggles to learn how to fly because the joys that motivated him when he was a little boy, ice cream and things like that, they're not the same joys for him now. And it's only when Peter remembers that the greatest joy he has is his children and his son that he suddenly becomes able to fly. He suddenly is free. And he suddenly has the ability to fight.

Now this fills me with an incredible amount of emotion to even mention it again. And when you get into your mid-50s, when you experience emotion that's strong, it's kind of exciting, it's unusual. You're kind of like, wow, that triggered me. You get curious about these things. So I began to think about why was it that that moment of Peter learning to fly again was so important to me?

And I realized that I had, over the past year or two, kind of experienced a similar joy. It happened particularly when we were on vacation this summer and we were staying at a family house on an island and the house is kind of ramshackle and there's no air conditioning and it was incredibly humid. And we had done as much activity as we could in the morning, and then it was just kind of that heat was penetrating everything and that humidity was weighing down everything. And we had no air conditioning, and so we went into the kind of side of the house, which is where we have a kitchen and a living room that's built into the hillside, it's in the basement. And we created this little kind of tunnel of wind with some fans, opening one window and opening another and closing off other things from the sun.

And we put out blankets and we lay on the blankets. And there for that moment, my family gathered together and we read together, we played games, we talked, we napped. And I suddenly realized, in that moment, as the coolness came out of the stone of the earth and cooled us off, I suddenly realized that this was my joy. That my joy was my family. And that joy was what allows me to fly.

And families, of course, are fragile. And families are, of course, things that need protection. You have to fight for families. And yet, at the same time, the best way we fight for them is by creating those little spaces, those precious moments, that space away. And that, it occurred to me, was the most important thing about the vacation.

It wasn't what we did, it wasn't where we went, it wasn't the weather, it wasn't what we could do. It was that space away in which we were together and complete as a family. And the preciousness of that was something that filled me with joy and it gave me the strength to fly. Now, all of this is a way for me to get us into an incredibly important teaching in our scriptures today. Because our scriptures are about the Sabbath.

And often times when we talk about the Sabbath, we see it as a point of deliberate rest in which we stop working. But I want to suggest to you that the heart of the Sabbath is not so much that we find the rest that is the opposite of work, but that we find the rest that is opposite of restlessness. Because when we find that rest that is the opposite of restlessness, we discover, again, the things that are most important in our lives. The things that are worth fighting for, the things that fill us with joy, the only things that really, at the end of the day, matter. And maybe the discovery I've made this summer is age appropriate.

You hit your 50s and you start to move from ambition to acceptance, so psychologists have told us. But I feel like I could never have known that joy had I not been in a church, in a place that observed the Sabbath, in which I had mentors who could teach me to look for some new joys as they themselves grew in Christ. So the Sabbath is a moment in which we find rest. The Sabbath is a moment in which that rest is an end to our restlessness. The Sabbath is a moment of healing and reconciliation.

All of this is evident in the scriptures for today. In our reading from Isaiah, you have an incredible moment in which the prophet holds the people accountable for pointing the finger and speaking of evil and pursuing their own interests and tells them, if you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of the Lord honorable. If you honor it, then you shall take delight in the Lord, then you shall find rest in the midst of all the restlessness of your life.

And in our reading from the gospel of Luke, there is this moment in which Jesus heals a woman who has been bent over for 18 years on the Sabbath. And this can cause some kind of distance between the normal adherence to the Sabbath by Jews. But what Jesus is trying to do is actually to identify the heart of his own Judaism. Which is to say that the Sabbath is a moment of healing. It's not about whether you switch on a light. It's rather, you make yourself present to God and it's about whether you have created space in your heart and in your world for a deeper connection to God.

The Sabbath is not about our priorities, so much as it's about seeing this connection, that thread of love that runs through each of us and ties us to each other and to God. And to see that thread of love expanding like a spider web to encompass the world and to create a connection that is deeper than anything else. Deeper than whether we observe or don't observe, deeper than whether or not we adhere to a kind of standard or fall short of it. That connection of love is powerful and the Sabbath is meant to help us see it.

A friend of mine who was a Jewish dentist, he used to tell me that he had doubts about God, but he did not doubt the Sabbath. Because when he would observe the Sabbath and light a candle, it was as if he said, a sacred architecture would descend and encompass my little home and create a space of holiness. And there he could rest. You and I are called to

create a Sabbath here. Creating the Sabbath together is probably one of the most important things we can do as a church.

We live in a time of incredible activity when nothing is ever sacred. And earlier this week when I put this out in Bible study, people began to talk about all the children's sports that happen on Sunday and how awful that was. And maybe we should make a stand and lock arms and try to change things. And frankly folks, you and I know that trying to combat the culture over those things, that is precisely what the enemies of the gospel have done since the beginning.

Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to tell you what to do or for us to tell someone else what to do. It's to create a space of holiness right here, and to create a space of connection right here, and to create a space of rest and reconciliation and healing right here in our midst. So you and I have an opportunity to recognize the kind of deep rhetoric, the deep argument that God makes for us by creating that space of Sabbath.

We live in a world in which there's a lot of finger pointing. To use words from Isaiah, in which a lot of people speak evil of one another, in which the church is constantly being tempted by its strong positions in the world around us to take one side or another in political fights. I think we could become the church God is calling us to be by actually declaring a Sabbath of all the political discussions around us. A Sabbath from CNN, a Sabbath from Wolf Blitzer saying, this just in. A Sabbath from chaos, a Sabbath from all of the ambiguity we live in. And a Sabbath here, in which people from many different places and positions find a connection and see that thread of love and reach out to one another.

That slow rhetoric of the gospel, that slow moment when mentors teach us about what it means to find new joys and we discover what it means to be a fully mature human being, that's the work God is calling us to do. The poem I have for you today is a kind of way to summarize all of this. It's by a mysterious poet. He goes by the name SAID and he always spells it with capital letters.

We know that he fled Iran in the late 1970s, probably because he was a dissident who spoke against the Shah. And now he lives in hiding in Germany. And all that we know about him is the occasional appearance where he'll read some sacred poetry. And this is one of his poems.

Lord
I refuse
to engage prayer as a weapon
I wish it to be like a river
between two shores
for I seek neither punishment nor grace
but rather new skin
that can bear this world

May we be a Sabbath people. May our prayers unite people from different shores through the river of grace. May we find the new skin that God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ, amen.

[End of Recording]