

Theodore Parker Church
Lay Your Burden Down
November 1, 2020

It has been a stressful lead up to an historical election on November 3rd. Let's take a moment to pause together and put the weight we have been carrying down for a time. We'll be in better shape to go forward for having made time to do so.

Opening Words

Lay It Down**

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

[Permission Source: Soul Matters Secured](#)

Here
here is where you can lay it down
Lay down all that you have carried
the weight of the world that has rounded
your back
leaving you aching and exhausted

Here
here is where healing begins
where burdens are set down
and alongside one another's
their magnitude does not seem as great

Here
here is where the door is thrown open
and the light can lift away the shadows
and what was hidden can now be seen

Here
here is where you can rest
where nothing is expected
but that you bring all of who you are
into the presence of the holy and of this loving community
Let us worship together.

Story

Good morning! Today's story is Three Sabbaths, by William White.

It's the story of three friends, three members of a community, who observe the sabbath on different days of the week. Sabbath is the tradition of taking a holy day of rest — putting your work and burdens and worries down for a whole day, every week, so that you can spend that day with loved ones, or spend it in prayer and contemplation. It's the tradition of prioritizing rest and connection, even when you have so much work to do, because there is a deep wisdom to knowing that each of us are more able to do our work in the world when we actually rest, and lay our burdens down for a time.

The idea and tradition of a Sabbath exists in so many cultures and religious traditions, we know there must be a real wisdom to it. And, particularly in times like these, I know that I find it so hard to feel that it's ok to put work and burdens down, even for an hour, let alone a whole day. There is so much important work to do, so many heavy worries to carry.

What this story invites us into is a reminder that part of what makes rest possible is for each of us to be in community with people who respect and cherish our need to rest. When we are in community with each other, we can take shifts — rest and support each other at different times — so that our holy work can be done and our families cared for each in time, each with each other's help.

Three Sabbaths by William White



Three Sabbaths

In a small village, three friends – a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian – farmed on adjoining land. The Muslim observed Friday as the Sabbath, the Jew observed Saturday as the Sabbath and the Christian observed Sunday as the Sabbath.

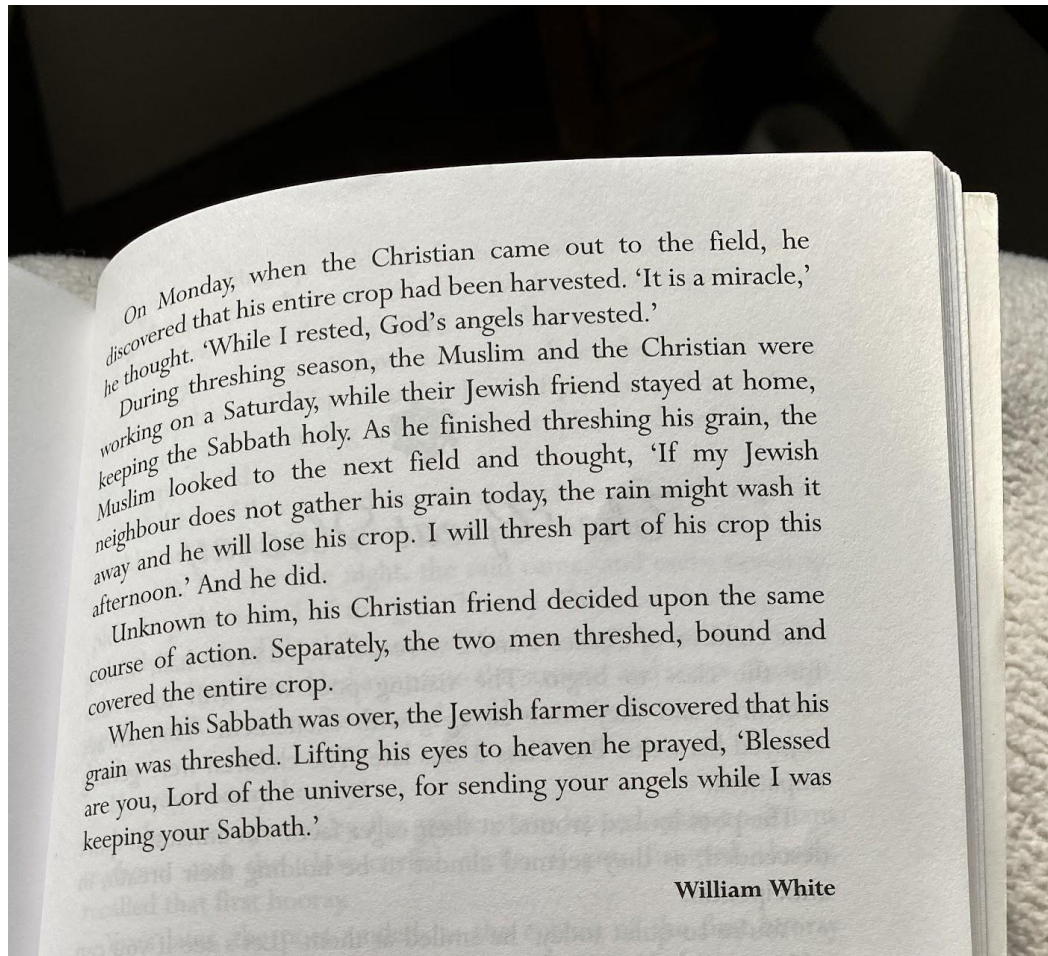
One autumn Friday, around noon, the Jew and the Christian finished ploughing their fields. As he sat eating his lunch, the Christian noticed that the field of his Muslim friend was not yet ploughed. 'If he does not plough it today, it may rain tomorrow and he will not be able to complete his planting. I could plough a bit of his field and thus make his work easier.' And he did.

In an adjoining field, his Jewish companion came upon an identical plan. Without consulting each other, the two men completed their neighbour's ploughing.

The next day, when the Muslim discovered that his field had been ploughed, he rejoiced saying, 'Surely, God has sent his angels to plough my field while I observed his day of rest.'

Months later, when harvest season arrived, the fields of the three friends flourished. One Sunday, the Jew and the Muslim were harvesting their crop while their Christian brother celebrated the Sabbath. As he completed harvesting his corn, the Jew noticed that the field of his Christian friend was ready to harvest. 'If he does not harvest today, he could lose a part of his crop,' he thought. 'I will pick his corn until it becomes dark.' And he did.

Completely unknown to him, his Muslim brother came to the same conclusion. Between them, they harvested their friend's entire field.



Blessed is the work we share together in community, so that each of us may rest, so that each of us may lay our burdens down for a time.

Meditation

Slower and Slower, by Mark Belletini

(from Sonata from Voice and Silence)

Let the difficulties of the week
take their sabbath now,
their brief and simple rest.
Let the worries of the week
lay their heft gently onto the dark earth
below this carpeted floor
which can bear them with greater ease
than any one of us can by ourselves.
Let the tangle of feelings,

the pull and push of these last seven days
sit still for a minute,
stop writhing in my heart,
and move no more than the Buddha
at rest under a tree.
Let there be stillness in my heart for a moment,
the balance point between breathing in
and breathing out, like the pause of a dancer
between movements in the music.
Let the breathing in this room be free and flowing,
let pulses trace a slower rhythm in the wrist.
Let the coming silence be like hands
pulling back a curtain,
revealing the table set with the feast of life
which is present here and now
and has been the whole while,
present to those who give up living in either the past
or the future.

Homily the Rev. Anne Bancroft

On All Saints Day, we think of the whole communion of saints, honoring those who have come before us and those who will come after. Right now, many of us are preparing to vote. Thinking of our past loved ones and what they did to leave us a better world, let us do the same for those who will come later. Let us vote this week — and work in the weeks ahead to protect the counting and the results of those votes — with the values of social and racial justice, democracy, human dignity, and creation care in mind, for the sake of the saints yet to come.

So friends - I joined the Bethel AME 24-hours of prayer last night. My hour was 1:00-2:00 a.m. - the first one, that is. I went into the prayer room earlier in the day to see what the vigil was like in a Zoom environment, and I will tell you it was humbling to be in a space so profoundly committed to the expression of God's love for this world - with unabashed gratitude and trust. There were prayers of petition, of course, for the health of loved ones, and for particular needs,

but the primary prayer was one of gratitude - for the unknown wisdom that is trusted and sought; gratitude, in fact, for everything.

It was a quiet hour in the middle of the night - with many boxes of names but only a few sharing their thoughts. Still, we spoke of what it is we are trying to put down these days in an effort to move forward more hopefully. It might not surprise you that the primary weight was fear - of the unknown, of how it makes us feel our efforts are insignificant, of our lack of control.

I am reminded, as you may be, of the Buddhist story about the traveling pair of monks, one of whom helps a woman to cross the river, and the other at odds with the choice his fellow monk has made. One puts the woman down as soon as the river is crossed; the other carries her much further in his mind, and on his heart.

Is it possible for us to put down what gets in the way of an easier journey through these challenging times? Might we trust that others will pick up the tasks when we each are practicing our own sabbath times? Because we all need these times of rest.

I hope we can.

I woke to the hopeful words of historian and writer, Heather Cox Richardson, who I'm guessing many of you may follow:

“. . . on this night of calm before the storm, I am the opposite of discouraged,” she says.

“Democracy is rising. It might not win on Tuesday—no jinxing here!—but if not then, the week after that, or the month after, or the year after. . . .

. . . For my part, I don't expect to like everything that happens in such a fertile world, but I do expect to learn, and grow, and feel privileged to watch the construction of a world that reflects our people at their best.”

For better or worse, these are our times, friends. May we trust that our rest will serve us to build on the work of the saints behind us on behalf of the saints before us; that this time of healing will strengthen us for all that is to come.

May it be so.