

Holy God, send Your Word, send Your Spirit, send Your love. Amen.

For this Lenten series on Sabbath-Keeping, I developed an acronym –
STOP – Sabbath: Time, Openness, Peace.

Today we focus on being open and observing, which is why I’ve invited us
to pause and reflect on how we’ve experienced our worship so far.

Because when we slow down for at least one day in seven,
we become more aware of what we are feeling, what people around us
are saying and feeling, and the activity of God around us.

We become more attuned to God-Life, and when we are in tune with God,
we are better able to move on God’s energy and timeline, not our own.

I would say the number one goal of spiritual practices is to become more
attuned to God’s speaking and moving within and around us.

I suspect God is always trying to communicate with us, and we need to learn
God’s language – we might say, our native language – to hear God.

We need to set our tuners to the frequency of the heavens.

Because if the record of Scripture is any indication,

God is trying to communicate with us, to get our attention.

And when we’re really not getting it, God will get loud.

That’s what God did with Moses – he so wanted Moses’ attention

he set a bush on fire, but it never burned up. And Moses stopped and looked.

God told him he had a mission for him, and a plan for him.

Moses did everything he could to talk God out of it, but eventually he said yes.

I believe God has a mission for each of us too, sometimes very specific ones –

organize this, start that garden, call that person who’s been on your mind.

I have a friend who began to get bombarded with images and stories and dreams
and coincidences about Uganda and she noticed, and paid attention.

She was able to join another church on a mission trip to Uganda,

and when she went there, all kinds of missions opened up through her.

Her church ended up supporting two orphanages and she got her town’s

Rotary Club to build a well so a village could have clean water.

God is capable of the big gesture to get our attention.

But most of the time, it seems that God is moving more quietly – just with us. Sometimes the circumstances of our lives occupy our attention and we're unaware of him, like Mary in the Garden of Gethsemane, or those men on the road to Emmaus.

We don't realize it's Jesus – until he does something or says something so familiar it breaks through to us.

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth," he said.

Can we start believing him?

How do we become more open to observing the Life of God around us?

Have you ever been on a mindfulness walk?

I knew someone who led these in an arboretum near where I used to live.

She would sit us all down on a log in the woods and instruct us to focus on living in the present moment with our senses and not on our thoughts – when a thought came in, rather than engaging it, come back to the present moment.

We practiced it before we started walking. She had us close our eyes – because for many of us, sight so dominates the other senses, and focus on what we could hear: birds, squirrels rustling leaves, a distant bell or airplane.

What do you hear right now?

What could we smell? Fresh air, rotting leaves, perhaps flowers...

What do you smell now? What could we taste?

What could we feel on our skin, on our faces? A breeze, sunlight...

What do you feel, sitting here? Temperature...the pew under you...

And finally, what could we see? Trees, sunlight shafting through leaves, bark..

What do you see here?

She invited us to take all of that in, and let it root us in that present moment.

And then we would walk in silence, invited to keep letting

the experience of our senses bring us back into this moment.

We tune into God-Life in much the same way.

We might ask, "What am I feeling? What emotions are up in me?"

What wounds or joys are occupying space?

What is my body feeling – where am I relaxed, where am I tight, where do I sense energy inside my body?

Where do I sense energy around me?

What nudges am I hearing in my spirit? Have I heard God say anything to me?

Where have I experienced God, where am I experiencing God right now?

We might make it a practice to run these questions at the end of a day,
or in the afternoon of our Sabbath day if we keep one,
or on Sunday afternoons. Just to become aware and part of God's Life.

We may not see a burning bush, but we can be sure Jesus is walking with us.
This is how Jesus shows himself to us, in his word spoken and proclaimed.
In the intimate connection of prayer, when he calls our names.
In the miracles he does through us – sometimes miracles of abundance,
or healing, miracles of friendship, of forgiveness, of faithfulness.

And he is present to us in this Sacrament of broken bread we share.
There is something about the taking and the blessing, the breaking and the eating,
that has enormous power to change lives.
The road to Emmaus is where we often live – weighed down by sadness,
thwartedness, anxiety, disappointed expectations, afraid to hope again.
But we are not alone on that road – we are walking with each other, and more,
someone is walking with us, someone we don't always recognize,
someone with power to heal our broken hopes.

He is always there. He promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you."
He is always there – we just don't always recognize him.
As we cultivate the spiritual practice of being open and observant, in rest,
Christ reveals himself to us.
Even now.

Amen.

THE GOSPEL

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"