

# “Sabbath Listening”

Isaiah 60:1-5 & Luke 5:33-39

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A typical bike ride for me is a spiritual experience. I talk and listen to God. I give thanks. I perceive God through all that surrounds me. The rhythm of pedaling, the exercise, sharpens my senses opening me to the movement of the Holy Spirit filling me with love, joy, insights and grace. For me, biking riding is Sabbath, a holy experience abounding with blessings.

A new bike light and the warm fall enabled me to keep riding my bike in the evening for weeks after the switch to standard time. Night time bike rides are great exercise but for the most part are lacking spiritual renewal. At night I get stuck in routine, to be safe I follow familiar paths where I know every bump, pothole, and traffic crossing. At night I am constantly scanning for potential obstacles. The busyness of my mind, the routine, the limited sight, hampers my ability to perceive God dispersing Sabbath.

We are entering the season of Epiphany, a time when God invites us to quiet our minds, heighten our senses, and change our routine, so we can perceive God. The wise men made space in their life for Sabbath: to journey, to absorb light, to sense God, and to worship God.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims, **Isaiah 60:1-5 NLT** “**Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance. “Look and see, for everyone is coming home! Your sons are coming from distant lands; your little daughters will be carried home. Your eyes will shine, and your heart will thrill with joy, for merchants from around the world will come to you. They will bring you the wealth of many lands.”**

We are about to embark on a Sabbath journey, a time to let go, listen to God, listen to each other, dream of God’s desires for each of us and this church. Observing Sabbath is making space and holding space for the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Faithful Sabbath needs to push back two major temptations. One, to jump to quick answers about God’s desire for us. Two, to think we already have the answers, so we continue to do everything the same way.

Tilden Edwards writes, “Sabbath involves all that we are; our bodies need to participate from head to toe, inside and out. Our minds and our prayers need to relax their frequent weekday grasping, striving, judging, and fearing. Sabbath is full openness. Full openness is God’s image revealed in us: wherein all possibility, perspective, loving is obscurely realized. Sabbath is a foretaste of the reign of God, shalom. Full Sabbath is graced rest. It is always present in potential, but we are rarely ready for it. We at least can put ourselves in its way in the quality of presence called Sabbath and be thankful for whatever loving presence is realized.” Tilden goes on to explain two dimensions of Sabbath. “The first is letting go, renouncing our normal routines and work. This frees us from normal demands and creates a different quality of space. Here we begin to disarm ourselves and intentionally stand more passively vulnerable, more naked before God, the truly Loving One. The second involves letting ourselves be in that fresh space in such a way that we realize appreciatively and joyfully our holy connectedness.”

Sabbath is creating space for God. Sabbath is letting go of mental and physical busyness, letting go of fear, judging, and logistics. Sabbath is being fully open to God, so we can dream about our potential and the church’s potential.

As your pastor, my primary role is to be the lead listener. Listening to God. Listening to you. Listening to our community then sharing what I hear with everyone. My calling is to create space for all of us to hear God and each other, so that means asking plenty of questions.

Soon I will give you questions to help you listen to God and each other during the sabbatical. My hope is that you will explore the answers by avoiding quick answers and resisting the routine of the same answers.

**Luke 5:33-39 NLT** “**One day some people said to Jesus, “John the Baptist’s disciples fast and pray regularly, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. Why are your disciples always eating and drinking?” Jesus responded, “Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. But someday**

**the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” Then Jesus gave them this illustration: “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be ruined, and the new patch wouldn’t even match the old garment. “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the new wine would burst the wineskins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the new wine. ‘The old is just fine,’ they say.”**

Fasting and prayer are wonderful, inspiring ways to worship God and discern God’s will, but Jesus teaches there will always be new ways to be faithful. God is always doing new things, ever creating. There will also be new ways to connect with God. Notice that Jesus doesn’t identify an order or a good, better, or best way. What is most inspiring to you will be least inspiring to another and vice a versa. We need Sabbath, a break in our routine, a break in our thought patterns, to listen, observe, and imagine the “new” God is doing in people all around us, the “new” in younger generations, and the “new” in our self. Resist the urge to give a final answer to the questions for three months; instead, listen and wrestle with them.

Jesus said, **“But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the new wine. ‘The old is just fine,’ they say.”** Jesus would probably say to us today. But no one who worships the traditional way wants to worship in new ways. The old worship is just fine, they say. Keep in mind that what you consider traditional worship has only been around for a short time. Once the organ was considered a radical distraction. Once traditional worship involved animal sacrifice. Worship is constantly evolving. Resist the urge to answers the questions in the same way you have for years; instead, consider all the options, try some new things, explore the endless height, depth, length, and width of God’s love, taste and see the abundant ways God is good. Take three months to open yourself to the Holy Spirit, to listen to God, to listen to others. Loving God means paying attention to God and what God loves. Authentic listening is transformational, opening the heart, dying to an old identity in order to become passionate in service, joy, and love.

MIT spent years consulting scientist, leaders, entrepreneurs, governments, and organization to learn if there is a pattern to transformation, innovation, and mutually beneficial for everyone solutions. They found a clear simple pattern that is challenging to live. The call it the U. It is a journey of openness, searching, listening, and letting go. Letting go of patterns of seeing and acting that cause us to skip across the surface. Letting go of applying habits, past solutions, past approaches, past thought patterns, past ways of being that cause us to skip across the surface. Letting go of self-centered to seeing from the whole. Letting go of comparisons with others that cripple our ability to transform into our full potential. What they have identified is Sabbath. The exodus, letting go of the old ways, holding space, asking questions, listening for forty years, before entering the Promise Land. Baptism, we continually need to let go of our sin, hold space, ask questions and listen to live into the abundant life God desires for us. Jesus’ passion, taking on the sins of the world, descending to hell, then letting them all go, holding space for three days, before resurrection. Every worship service we let go by gathering together, singing, confessing, holding space to listen to God’s word, before going out to love and serve. Any loving relationship lets go of self, to listen to the other, so we can love and be loved.

I am taking so long to give you questions, because I know that some of you will be tempted to answer right away. My hope is all of us will ponder and discuss these questions for three months. During the Sabbatical, we will be creating a Sabbath book illustrating insights from all of us. During the Sabbatical, we hope everyone will join a small group to experience Sabbath. Talk to Lisa Sellie to join a group. In four months we will have a day retreat here at church where we will share our answers.

During the sabbatical, listen to God, listen to each other, listen to our community, and listen to the world. Keep an open mind. Let go of judging. Let go of categorizing ideas into good or bad or better than another. Keep an open heart. Let go of fear, indifference, hate, anxiety, and worry. Keep an open will. Let go of your agenda, your experiences. Hold the space to listen. These questions are in the bulletin and will be in the Gathering Space throughout the sabbatical.

### AN AWARE HEART.

Where have you been loved, surprised by joy?

Where have you been changed? When have you given love?

What do you want to be changed, healed, forgiven, renewed, transformed, resurrected?

### AN AWAKENED HEART

Where are you connected today? Do you sense belonging?

When have you been thankful? Have you asked for forgiveness?

How does God respond?

### A LISTENING HEART

How do you pay attention? Are you inspired as you read?

Can you read scripture for inspiration, plus finding inspiration in other places?

What is the language God uses to your heart, soul, mind?

### BECOMING OPEN HEARTED

Where and how do you receive deeper love? Where are your blocks?

How do you receive forgiveness and healing? Repent?

Does God invite you to a change of heart?

### A HEART THAT BELONGS

Where is your, our communion and community? Your unique call?

What is wildly important? How do you, we, know we are doing this?

How will we keep on listening?

### THE LOVE OF CHRIST DWELLS IN OUR HEART

How can you, we, continue to take, receive, and give?

How can we know God in us? Respond by a change of heart?

What is your, our, continual and changing practice?

For this next section of questions, I want to assure you that as long as we have a handful of people who desire to worship in the 9:15 style we will continue that style of worship; so, let go of any fear or worry that you will lose your cherished way to worship.

### MAKING DISCIPLES

How will we make disciples, pass the good news onto the next generation?

What is more important passing on our specific ways of experiencing God or helping others find an inspiring way for them to experience God?

When Jesus was in human flesh many felt excluded and judged by the religious leaders. How do we exclude?

How do we judge? How can we welcome? How can we offer gracious hospitality? How do we give the impression that we are more interested in preserving our traditions than sharing the joy of God's grace with others?

Should we expand our partnership with El Shadai New Hope Ministries? If yes then how?

### WORSHIPING GOD

What is more important, passing on our specific style of worship or helping others find a style of worship that enables them to passionately glorify God?

We will keep 9:15 traditional worship. Should we recreate 10:45 worship?

The style of our contemporary worship has been around for over thirty years, so no longer contemporary. What contemporary aspects should we add to this service?

Is it helpful during the sabbatical to try ways of worship that are new to you, even if you do not like them, so you can invite others to the new ways of worship we decide to offer?

During the sabbatical, you will have three opportunities to do worshipful work. Should we continue worshipful work? If yes then how?

During the sabbatical, you will have an opportunity to worship through experientials. Should we offer experiential worship?

During the sabbatical, you will have an opportunity to hear different people share during worship? Is this inspiring?

Churches that are growing in attendance of young adults have dialogue instead of monologue in the sermon space. How can we have interaction in worship? Should we project tweets from worshipers? Should we communicate the scripture in advance working questions and insights into the message? Should we ask questions and break into clusters of 3 to 5 to share? Should we occasionally alter the joys and concerns encouraging everyone to share a thanksgiving or a way they experience God or a spiritual question?

Currently we have college students worshiping with us via sermons on Facebook. How should we embrace technology? Should we use technology to have joint worship with people around the world?

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

The vision of our presbytery is, "We fearlessly follow the Holy Spirit into a changing world." How do we discover where the Holy Spirit is leading us?

The Presbytery is making a major shift from investing in buildings to investing in creative innovative ministry, from spending money on building renovations to transforming lives. What should our ministry priority be?

Where should we spend our money? If we present a creative, innovative ministry dream we will receive \$20,000 a year for 5 years from the presbytery. It must be something totally new, different than anything we are doing. What creative innovative ministry will we launch?

## COMMUNITY

How do we bless our community? For what are we known in our community? How can we serve our community?

None of us can fathom what it is like to be in another's shoes, partly because the world is rapidly changing. How can we find out the spiritual needs of individuals who do not belong to a family of faith? What aspect of the Good News will help them take the next step on their faith journey? How should we provide this aspect?

## FELLOWSHIP/EDUCATION

How can we stimulate conversations about each other's faith journeys?

How can we care, nurture, and love one another?

How can we celebrate all that God is doing in, through and around us?

How can we support and inspire our seniors, young adults, singles, and families with young children?

## MISSION

What missions fill you with joy, meets a critical need and enlightens the recipients?

Would you rather give money and have someone else do the mission or be involved in the mission yourself?

Should mission be something we do for another or something we do with another?

We give generous to numerous missions, do we need to improve our communication of all we are doing and how to get involved?

Do we ask for mission giving to often or not enough?

These questions are just a start. Please add your own questions. Share your questions during fellowship and in the small group you will join. Ask questions of your family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Let go, so you can truly listen. Imagine every option with no regard to logistics or cost. Push aside quick answers. Hold the space. Welcome the Holy Spirit. By taking time to pause and rest, we can be mindful of and rejoice in God's abundant love and blessings for us, and be renewed by God's refreshing power to partner with God and one another in sharing God's joyful love for the world. Amen

