

From the Pastor ...

August 30

God's Salvation Garden

In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.

James 1:21

As I look out my window at our home's small front garden, it strikes me that it stands in need of a good landscaper to tame the volunteer flowers (which many call weeds) and to cut away the extra thistles and to open up space for the bush that has been crowded by encroaching plants. And I wonder whether God notices a lot of similar things when looking at my life and planning the salvation-garden James imagines in this passage from yesterday's scripture. I love this image of God as the master gardener working in the soil of my life to create salvation for all of God's creation. The Word, says James, is what God will use to shape and prune my life; to cut back what is impeding my growth and to nourish what reflects God's great love. The Word, of course, is Jesus whose life and ministry have modeled for us what it means to follow God's priorities in the world. To allow God's Word, Jesus, to fashion our lives is to embrace all that Jesus taught about loving our neighbor, forgiving our debtors, blessing those whom life has marginalized and forgotten. In humility, we must invite God into the gardens of our lives to create the flourishing life God has always imagined can exist there. As the season wanes and the new program year approaches, do we have the courage to invite God into our lives to prune back all the bits that have flourished in a shower of worldly rain and to open up space for the parts that have been starving for the light of God's presence? What can God make of the salvation-garden that is our life together? Let's invite God in and find out!

August 23

God's Roads to Travel

And how blessed all those in whom you live, whose lives become roads you travel. Psalm 84:5

How blessed we are to be those in whom God lives, whose lives become roads God travels. I love this image from yesterday's Psalm selection. The idea of our lives being roads that God travels holds a deep appeal for me. For God to travel the road of my life is for God to be intimately involved in every aspect of my circumstances and my being. It is for God to encounter, alongside me, the steep and rocky climbs I face and the smooth and easy meanderings I enjoy. It is for God to lean around a corner with me to see what lies beyond, and to stand with me at a crossroads as I ponder which way to turn. To accept God's

invitation to dwell within me and to travel down the road of my life, is to receive God's powerful presence, to sink into God's comfort and to listen for God's wisdom. Alas, in the noisiness of our lives, it is easy to lose sight of God's presence within us, easy to miss God's gentle guidance. This week, as we travel the roads of our lives, let us be mindful of God's presence, alert for the nudge of God's Spirit, open to the wisdom of God's creative energy.

Summer 2021 Harbinger

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. Genesis 2:3

This week, as I begin to see my schedule easing up, I have found myself thinking about sabbath rest. Not just a cessation of work, or a hiatus from regular chores, but a rest that actively renews my spirit, an intentional *being* (instead of *doing*) that allows me to connect with the part of me that most longs for God's presence. I don't know about you, but I feel weary after months of pandemic life. Just as new vistas are opening again, inviting us into a wider more vibrant life than we have been able to enjoy for more than a year, I realize that I am not sure I want to return to all that busy-ness. For months, I have waited for that moment when I can... enter a restaurant to share a meal with a friend, attend a live concert to hear our sons play in their orchestras, travel to see my mother and sister. But as these possibilities become realities, I am noticing some internal resistance to all this activity. While our enforced pandemic "rest" has not brought relief for many of us, it has invited us to rethink our ideas about work/life balances. What rhythms of life might we choose to create as we move into this new post-pandemic existence?

Our Bible relates the story of how God formed the world. Each day God labors. God surveys the work. God calls it good. And there is evening and there is morning. Another day. Even within these first days of work, there are regular periods of rest, and one can feel the rhythm of this cycle ebbing and flowing as God speaks each part of creation into existence. Of course, after God has created the whole world, God calls for a whole day of rest. A time to reflect on what has been created, to enjoy that creation, to sink into all that is good. As we begin to emerge from our pandemic restrictions, I hear God inviting us, too, to enter into this deeper, more sustaining rhythm of work and rest and to reconsider how we spend our days. Instead of rushing back to our pre-pandemic existences, falling down once more before our culture's idol of busy-ness, we have an opportunity to be intentional about what we choose to pick back up. Here is our opportunity to stop and examine each aspect of our lives, asking, does this bring me joy? Does this build up God's creation? Does this promote the flourishing of all people? We seldom have the opportunity and the space to radically re-order our lives and to reimagine what would constitute the most life affirming way for us to be in the world. One of the unexpected gifts of the pandemic is this moment when we can do just that. Having been forced to lay down many aspects of our lives, we have also had space to ponder which of them matters most to us and which we can let go. In a time of such conflict and mistrust in our communities and our nation, we will need to feel God's sustaining power and receive the renewal of the Spirit that comes only from true sabbath rest. This summer, as we re-enter our lives, let us reflect on what renews and what drains our spirits. Let's identify the ways we can best use the gifts and resources God has given us to build up God's creation. Let's commit to a new rhythm of work and rest.

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