

Shabbat! Genesis 1:31-2:3

Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV May 2016

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

This is a story that was found in a journal of a man named George, who had some pretty incredible encounters with a dragon named Igor.¹

After the Lord God created the world and all that was to live upon it and had divided time into seven days, the Devil came demanding his share of time. God proposed that they divide the week equally, each taking three and one-half days. But the Devil proposed, instead, that they play poker for the possession of the days. Now God knew that the Devil always cheated when he played poker, but God just smiled and asked for a new deck of cards.

The Devil insisted that the stakes for the game be the first and last days of the work week. With his usual cheating, the Devil won the first game. Gathering up his winnings, he said to himself, “Ah! I can get each week off to a bad start by putting folks on the wrong foot. I can instill [comparison and coveting and let them think it’s just “healthy competition”] and other vices on the first day of the week. And with the last day, I can show them delicious ways to ‘let their hair down’ after a weary week of labor.”

Game followed game, and God allowed the Devil to win six whole days! Only one day remained – and God, with a riverboat gambler’s flourish, laid out a royal flush on the table and won the seventh day.

As the Devil walked away from the green-topped card table, he chuckled to himself, “Great winning odds, six to one! With such odds, I can’t help but win the world.”

As God rose from the table, a circle of angels, who had watched the card game, shook their heads in dismay, “Why, Lord God? Why did you let that cheating Devil win six of the seven days? What can you do with only one day?”

And God Answered, “Oh, I’ve got special plans. I only need one day; that’s more than enough.”

An angel exclaimed, “Of course, we should have guessed. One day full of prayer and worship will give your children the strength they need to remain faithful to you for the other six!”

God smiled. “That wasn’t exactly what I had in mind,” he said. “All I need is one day for them to enjoy me! They can savor me when they enjoy leisure, when they rest. For it is only then that they can recognize and return the love that I have put into all creation – which is stronger than all the Devil’s daily temptations. Once they learn how to love through rest and play, the Devil won’t have a chance!”

Jesus seemed to get in trouble over the Sabbath during most of his ministry. People seemed to always be objecting to how he handled the Sabbath – healing, eating, somehow violating the “rules.” And he would usually respond with something along the lines of “Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath.” (e.g. Mark 2:27)

And, it seems from where I observe life going by, we have generally taken Jesus' admonition, **Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath.** to mean that "It Just Doesn't Matter."

And THAT is NOT AT ALL what Jesus said.

Rather than seeing the Sabbath as a "It just doesn't matter; do whatever you want" OR as a "Don't lift a finger, or you will go to Hell." It seems that the story I just shared – even though not exactly as it appears in the Bible, is what the Bible is all about.

Sabbath is meant to be a time in which we slow down, not just 'stop working,' but also in which we relax into God's love.

- Jesus often talks about love: e.g. **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."** (John 13:34)
- Jesus also often talks about tiny little things like mustard seeds and leaven, e.g. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed ... The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened."** (Matthew 13:31,33)

Little things can make a HUGE difference – particularly when it is L O V E.

Please, please, please, for the Love of God, quit turning the **eternal and abundant life message of Jesus** into

- a new way to make commandments;
- a new way to measure if you are living up to God's standards;
- a new way to worry about if your "salvation is secure."

I got a set of text messages once from a young man who was so very, very worried that perhaps he had not done enough to make his salvation secure.

Really? Is that what Jesus came to give us – a new set of worries.

If you take the time – just one day a week is really all that you must – *although I must confess there is a very good chance that it will eventually leak over into all the other days* – and just allow yourself to do N-O-T-H-I-N-G except to relax in God’s love.

- No comparisons to others
- No worries if you have done enough to please this angry God that someone told you is God’s nature (NOT!)
- No trying to live up on everyone else’s expectations

Just relax in God’s love. That’s all.

- JESUS DID NOT COME TO CHANGE GOD’S MIND ABOUT US – THAT WE ARE WORTHY ENOUGH.
- Jesus came to change OUR minds about God – that God really does love us.
- Really!
- And that love is UNconditional.

Or, as Saint Paul put it:

I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38)

As the story that I told tonight concluded:

God smiled. ... “All I need is one day for them to enjoy me! They can savor me when they enjoy leisure, when they rest. For it is only then that they can recognize and return the love that I have put into all creation – which is stronger than all the Devil’s daily temptations. Once they learn

how to love through rest and play, the Devil won't have a chance!"

The Devil's favorite temptation is to tell you that you are not good enough. And COMPARISON is one of the Devil's favorite ways to communicate that message: "You're not as good as so-and-so; just look at you ... pa-thet-ic!"

And God's antidote is always: LOVE.

Please, please, please, for the love of God – set aside some time and just wallow in rest and relaxation and God's love.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

ⁱ Edward Hays, *St George and the Dragon And the Quest for the Holy Grail* (Easton KS: Forest of Peace Books Inc., 1986) 58-60.