

## “Renew”

### Leviticus 25: 1-6

It seems only appropriate that as a Certified Green Chalice congregation, we talk about Sabbath Keeping in terms of our relationship with the land, in terms of our relationship with all of God’s creation.

Now, I’ll admit, I am not farmer. I have my small raised gardens in which I try to coax some summer veggies to grow each year. I have never claimed to be an expert in farming by any means. But I can tell you that farming is in my blood, is in my DNA. I am only one generation from my family being farmers. My grandfather was a farmer and his father before that was as well. I can still remember going to the old home place as children when we would visit my grandparents during the summer. We would go out there and help pick the gifts of the land. And I would always noticed that out of all the fields, my grandfather would leave one or two empty. I was surprised by this because well, my grandparents weren’t rich. I was sure that if he planted that one more field, he would get more produce and then he could make more money. Because, for a kid, that was my logic.

More produce equals more money equals more toys for me.

But I can still remember when I asked my grandfather why he left that particular field empty that year, he looked at me with wisdom in his eyes, wisdom beyond my few years and simply said, “We get out what we put into the land. If I don’t let the land rest, if I don’t give it time for renewal, than I am in worse shape than before I started. The produce would be small and not quality. It would be take more effort on my part just to get anything to grow. I would probably lose money on that field rather than make any. So I let it sit empty, giving it a chance to rest and to renew, knowing that next year, the gifts from that particular field will be worth the wait.

I can still remember the wisdom that he shared with me that day. It was simple and to the point. And as I think back on it, it was deeply theological. Just like our relationship with God, we get out what we put into it. If we don’t take the time to step away from the craziness of the world to reconnect with the presence of God, to find rest for our souls, to find renewal for our spirits, than we become empty vessels that can no longer bring the light of Christ to the world.

So when it comes to care of God’s creation, if we don’t let it have the time to rest and renew, all we will see is pale imitations of the beauty and wonder that fill our world now.

Just like us, God’s creation needs Sabbath time.

As I look back on this conversation with my grandfather, I realize that he could have said something else, something that was less life transforming, something that was less life giving.

He could have easily told me the scientific reasons behind his methods such as by allowing the weeds to taken over, the weeds of the field actually bring minerals to the topsoil, strengthening it and restoring it. My grandfather could have easily said “We let the land go fallow because the microcosms in the soil work as mini composters and this gives them time to do their job. My grandfather could have easily said, “We let the field sit empty because the old plants and produce begin to decompose and rot, thereby regenerating the topsoil, adding to the richness of minerals and nutrients needed to grow next year’s crop.

He could have said all of those things but I’m not sure they would have stayed with me like his simple theologically grounded reply actually did. “We get out what we put in the land. We experience the gifts of the land only when we take the time to care for land and give it opportunities to rest and renew.

As I have lived with this text this past week, I have come to realize that we have forgotten that wisdom. We have forgotten our connection to the land. We have forgotten our connection to God’s creation. We have forgotten the need for rest and renewal, not just for us, but for all of God’s creation.

For you see, unfortunately, we have forgotten that the practice of Sabbath Keeping is not meant for just us as human beings. It is a gift for all of God's creation. In fact, we are told that as the Israelites were getting ready to enter into the promise land, God handed down to Moses certain guidelines that would help them be the community of faith God called them to be, to be the community of faith the world needed them to be.

Interestingly enough, the guidelines didn't just include how they were to relate to one another. They also included how they were supposed to relate the land. These guidelines included how they were supposed to care for the land. These guidelines included ways for their community and for the land to find ways for rest and renewal.

I didn't read all of Leviticus 25 because well, it's Leviticus. It seems that whenever we read Leviticus, we seem to get lost and turned around in all the laws, in all the rules and regulations. So I decided to give us the cliff note version:

Here it is: In this section, God calls for Israel to take the seventh year as a sabbath year. No planting of the land. They were just supposed to let the land rest and renew. And anything that happened to grow in the fields was there for eating.

Then in the seventh rotation of seven times seven years-the people were called to have a Jubilee year in which the people were to forgive debts and return property because...wait for it...

“ for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.”

Let me say that again: for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.”

Think about that for a minute. God didn't call the people Beloved Children at this moment. God didn't even call them the people of Israel. In this defining moment, the identity the people were given was tenants...people who lease the land. In this moment, God reminded them that they were on a journey, a journey of life, a journey of faith, a journey that lead them to the land that was God's very own.

With this one statement, God reminds the people that everything they have is on loan from God. They do not own it. They do not have claim over it. The land and all that is in it, the land and all that it produces are gifts from God, gifts that sustain and bring life to the people of God.

With just these few words, God reminds the people, and even reminds us that we are only here for a short time. Everything belongs to God and during our

time here on earth as people of faith, we are called to care for the gifts of God's creation.

God expects us to conduct our lives, to conduct our businesses, to conduct our relationships as if we realize we are only borrowing these gifts from God for a little while. We are called to live in a way that faithfully reflects the understanding that God is God and we are not. We are called to be caretakers of God's creation, not because it is the right thing to do but because, it is God's and not ours to use and abuse.

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This changes everything. It changes how we relate to one another. It changes how we interact with one another. It especially changes how we view creation and how we relate to it. Creation is not here to be used and abused by us. It is here as a gift from our God as ways to sustain life, to create life, to bring life to us as God's people. And that means we need to start changing how we take care of it.

You see, the value of the land cannot be measured in what we pay for it. I know that our world puts value on everything, including pieces of property. You can't go anywhere without seeing for sale signs that tell us if we pay a certain amount, then we will own that piece of land.

But in our text today, we are reminded we truly don't own anything. We are just borrowing it for a while. And in doing so, we are invited to change how we view the worth of the land. No longer is it by dollar amount. The value and worth of the land is now measured in its ability to sustain life.

Maybe if that was how the conversation surrounding care of God's creation was started, we wouldn't be so quick to pave over it so soon.

As people of faith, we are called to view the land, to view the natural resources it provides, we are called to view all of Creation as gifts from God that are only ours for a little while. We are called to realize that all of God's creation is first and foremost God's and we are called to be caretakers of this wonderful life sustaining gift. As people of faith, it is time for us to realize that the land, the sea, the air, the animals, the birds, all of the things that fill God's creation are beings that have intrinsic worth because they sustain us, and bring us life.

Everything, from the air we breathe, to the water that we drink, to the land in which we grow our crops, everything is God's and we are only borrowing it for a little while.

There is a Native American saying that reminds us that we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children. It goes on to say that No

longer can we simply think of our survival. Each new generation is responsible to ensure the survival of the seventh generation.

In embracing this wisdom, there is something to this sabbath for the land, this time of sabbath for all of God's creation. Because by doing so, we begin to realize we only get out of the land what we put in. We begin to realize that we can only experience the gifts of the land when we take the time to care for land and give it opportunities to rest and renew.

Maybe our challenge as people of faith is to stop thinking short term and start visioning the long-term, visioning to the seventh generation. Maybe our challenge is to ask ourselves how we are protecting God's creation not just for ourselves but for generations to come. Maybe our challenge is to stop thinking in short time and start thinking in terms of God's time as we ask ourselves how are the decisions we are making affecting the air, the land, the water, the animals, the birds, the plants, affecting all of God's creation.

Maybe our challenge as people of faith is realizing that we are just aliens and tenants and the land is God's.

Now is the time to remember that everything we do matters. It has effects on the web of life, not just now but for generations to come. Now is the time to remember that we get out of the land what we put into to it. Now is the time to

remember and reclaim the practice of Sabbath not just for us but for all of God's creation so that new life can burst forth. Now is the time for all of us, including God's creation, to seek rest and renewal so that life can and will be sustained for many generations to come.

May it be so. Amen.