

“The Nairobi Trio!”

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“Shabbat”

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There are boulder days, days when life tumbles like a boulder crushing you. Those days we usually can handle. Then there are piranha days, days when you feel like you're being nibbled to death by hundreds of hungry piranha. On such days, you need a silly laugh to keep you from going nuts or crying. We welcome good humor rather than the vicious kind too rampant, too easy.

My son agrees. Give us Monty Python rehabilitation. This parrot's not dead, he's resting. The ministry of Silly Walks. The tennis playing giant Blancmange. Spam, spam, spam. Singing lumberjacks. Or give me a tonic slug of Ernie Kovacs. Cigar smoking underwater. Eugene's tilted table. The Nairobi Trio!

But escape and entertainment can relieve you only so far. We need the Sabbath much more. This wonderful Hebrew word, “Shabbat,” means ‘to rest, to desist.’ Think of the word ‘rest’ as refreshment, restoration rather than indolence, cessation that renews, reconciles.

For our brothers and sisters who practice the Jewish faith, Sabbath runs from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. For Christians, the first day of the week became their Sabbath because Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians could fellowship together for a pot-luck supper after work on Sunday, sharing songs, prayers, reading and discussing scripture (which was the Torah and Prophets). Jesus, after all, was a good Jew. Say, let's invite Christian nationalists and white supremacists to a decent Bible study. They could use one.

For Hebrews, Sabbath was a distinctive weekly reminder that they were free men and women. Slaves don't enjoy a day off. Sabbath meant they weren't held in bondage to Mammon or Molech, the boss gods of mercenary profit, consumption, and futile labor. Freed from the hamster wheel. There should be dignity to our labors.

Imagine lacking a Sabbath. How cruel it is to be denied this divine gift to regain meaning for our lives. In a world that seeks to own our soul, we recover through Sabbath the confidence that God holds our soul. Our soul is not for sale. In a distorted world, besotted by vanity, where some scoff at those who play by the rules, a world where pro-Orbán, anti-Cheney folks tear things down in order to make the world in their unholy image, Sabbath invites us to re-create a world made in the image of God, as intended.

Sabbath frees us to let our lives be brought back into focus, because we sure can stumble and get discombobulated (in Yiddish, ‘fershimmeled’) by the world's troubles and temptations, its stresses and dis-ease. We need this blessed holy pause to the insane fever and frenzy. We repair and recalibrate our lives, regularly. We receive a spiritual lens by which we see clearly enough to adjust our material pursuits.

My buddy and I again are coaching an AYSO U-12 team of boys and girls. Imagine a game without a halftime. Why a halftime? The kids need to rest, recoup, hydrate, munch on orange slices. It also gives the team a time-out, a time to re-evaluate how they are playing and what remedies they need to adopt

for the remainder of the match. What bad habits do they need to fix? Which obstacles to playing well do we need to correct before they run back onto the field?

Sabbath is a mature skill. It is the best chance to put our lives in perspective through worship, through communities of faith, reclaiming sanity. It's a day reserved for higher and deeper pursuits. Quakers call this clearness, mindfulness, a centering of mind, heart, and soul. In a world full of us maddening, nibbling humans acting according to our spleens, a little mindfulness can get us back on track, in better graces. The Sabbath gives us the chance to reflect on our lives and evaluate if how we spend our time is worthwhile, rewarding. We find balance by confessing our failures, our mistakes, our hurts. Pity the person unable or unwilling to confess their sins. By huddling in worship, we prepare ourselves for the work the remainder of the week demands.

Which means, of course, our modern Sabbath practices leave much to be desired. Count the cost of having nothing worth reverencing. Repeat after me: It's not about me.

Now, here's an idea. How about our nation observing a Sabbath? How about taking a soul-searching time-out so we can reflect on what we are doing, who we are, what we value? Let's be reverent enough to ask ourselves: Is this who we want to be?