

An Anchor and a Sail

Genesis 1:29 – 2:3

Matthew 6:22—33

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How often do you hear people say, with a big sigh, “I’m so busy.”
I have so much to do. Where does the time go?

Every few years they come out with a study saying people are working more.
The most recent study I heard of says
They are not even taking their vacation.

We are busy;
Earn a living. Try to move up some sort of career path.
Take care of family.
Exercise: make sure our heart is strong enough, our bodies buff enough, our thighs thin enough.
Pay the bills.
Clean the house.
And check all those texts, twitters and emails.

You know that old saying: “So much to do, so little motivation.

I was delighted to discover Charles Schultz lived in St Paul: wonderful.
A favorite Charlie Brown quote: “I have a new philosophy. From now on,
I am only going to dread one day at a time.”

There is a lack of meaning. It leaves people worn out. Distant. Cynical.
Bored amid the busyness. Dreading what comes next. They have lost the sense of meaning. Life gets confusing.

You know the story of the 2 rivals: Ralph and Joe. They’d been competing every day at work for years.
Then they’d go out on the golf course and compete on the weekend. They went out earlier than everyone else so not one would get in their way. Carrying their clubs to prove who was stronger.
Then one Sunday morning on the 16th tee, at the far end of the course, Joe had a heart attack.
Ralph dragged Joe all the way back to the clubhouse. After the ambulance came, people complimented Ralph. “It must have been tough bringing him back all the way from the 16th tee.”
Ralph admitted: “It was. The whole way back, it was, “Hit the ball, drag Joe. Hit the ball, drag Joe.””

Too busy, too competitive, too anxious, we lose the sense of what life is all about. We lose our perspective.

Jesus says: “The eye is the light of the body. If a speck or a log is in your eye, we can’t see what life is about. With distorted vision, you can do a lot of damage. Or you can simply waste a lot of time, including wasting your life.

Why worship? To answer that question, we start with the first chapter in Genesis: To put life into perspective.

I had a friend who gave the world's shortest sermon. He read the first 5 words of the book of Genesis. Then he said, Amen, and sat down. "In the beginning, God...." That was the message. In the beginning, God. It begins to put things in perspective, doesn't it? God, the creator.

Yes, I believe in the big bang theory, evolution and all sorts of incredibly helpful scientific theories. But more than this I believe, In the beginning, God. There is a lifetime, an eternity of wonder in that phrase alone. I come to worship, to open myself to the wonder of God.

God created people: from the beginning, God does not create them alone,
But together. A people.

I come to worship to be with God's people: somehow, we only understand life in community.

We come to experience the meaning of life: As we celebrate the story of creation. God the one who brings order to the chaos. Fullness to the emptiness,

Life to the lifeless.

Light to the darkness.

In the beginning, God.

And in the chaos that has no meaning, God brings goodness.

God separates the day from the night,

the sea from the mountains,

the grasses and the grains,

God who creates the animals, the fish, the bugs and the cattle.

Out of order comes goodness.

From this blessed rage for order,

God creates every human being,

in all their diversity, uniqueness, difference,

each a living reminder, symbol, sign,

because each is created in the image of God.

Why worship?

To take time to lose ourselves in a sense of wonder.

Worship, in whatever form, always uses the arts.

Whether it is magnificent architecture or standing in an open air circle of worshipers,

whether it is a fabulous instruments and singers and ringers, and orchestra,

or a single solo voice to lead,

the most well crafted wordsmith

or a simple story told from the heart:

we worship through the arts.

Why?

Nicholas Wolterstorff stresses that God created a people, not individuals alone. In worship there is a meeting of God with all those people. A time when both parties act. "They act reciprocally, chiefly by both parties addressing and speaking to each other." The liturgy of worship is a dialogue between God and God's people. In the artistic actions we take in worship, God encounters God's people. The people respond in praise. The people realize their shortcomings, their sins. They are free to be honest: and confess. And God is free to love and forgive.

Each part of worship: a dialogue. Where God speaks to us: (and we listen)

and we speak to God. (and we sense that God listens to us.)

Holiness as defined by Nicholas Wolterstorff is "radiant excellence."

Beauty. Goodness. Wonder. Admiration. Mystery. Mysterium et tremendum.
Opens us up to transcendence.
God's transcendence.

Does not allow the world as it is to define reality.
Worship allows us to experience a reality that is more real than the reality that surrounds us.

We sing: "Holy, Holy, Holy." Radiant excellence. Transcendence. Experiences of God. They anchor us in grace. In God's wonder, transcendence. In God's love. We feel secure.
It also takes us beyond ourselves, beyond the world as it is. Not just an anchor, but a sail.

(Wolterstorff 76-77)

we have a duty to God not to squander our lives but to nurture ourself, to become who we are called to be. Even more, we also have a duty to nurture a solidarity with other people, to love one another. to love our neighbor as ourselves.
Not out by ourselves alone, but worship with other people who sometimes frustrate us. But even so, with other people who in spite of themselves remind us of the wonder. Who remind us of the hand of the creator who shaped each face. The philosopher Levinas speaks of the radical alterity of the the face. The otherness of the other.

Why do we worship? We worship because we seek to open ourselves to a sense of transcendence. In God. In one another.
Not vague, delusions of disembodied perfection.
But real, flesh and blood people.

God created the animals, and called them good.
God creates the human beings, and God called them very good.
With them, God was exceedingly pleased.

We worship to experience the transcendence.
We worship to experience the immanence.

We worship to remember who we are.
And whose we are.
Genesis says: God worked six days, and then God rested.
God took time to take it all in.
To see the wonder of it all.
To experience the joy.
Karl Barth suggested this was a way for God to show us how Good life is.
That we take one day every week to remember how Good life is: how good God is.
God commands God's people: step back.
Sure, you need to work.
But work, without taking time to wonder,
is slavery.

Why worship? To remind yourself: of who you are.
To say to the world: We are all created in God's image.

We are loved by God.

We are not slaves.

In Christ, we are a new creation, and we are free.

to live in that new world.

I am not a slave.

And I will not stand on the side of those who seek to work other people to death.

Literal death:

Or spiritual death:

That comes from

Why worship? To say to the world, and to ourselves

I am not a slave. I will not enslave you.

Why worship?

Worship is an anchor and a sail.

Worship anchors us in the love of God.

In the chaos, the journey, the movement of our lives,
we find ourselves anchored in something deep. Mysterious.

Yet solid.

Worship helps us feel anchored in the grace of God.

If you love someone, you need to practice:

practice showing them, through actions large and small.

You need to practice it by telling them,

often,

creatively,

well.

If you love someone, you let other people know.

You may tell other people how much you love and feel loved.

Or you may just talk about your beloved.

Sing his or her praises.

Because you hold them with a sense of wonder,

and the more you show it,

the more you says it,

the more you grow into it.

These loving deeds and words are the lifeblood of a relationship.

We have a relationship with God.

To grow in that relationship, we take time to say it.

To sing God's praises.

Not because God needs it.

But because we need it.

To grow in our awareness.

To grow in the depth that we feel.

Mark Kline Taylor of Princeton talks about our religious experience in terms of Admiration.

To look at a d see the wonder, depth, beauty of God's good creation.

To admire the people around us: to take in something of the irreducible otherness Amazement in the face of each and every person.

If we do these things in worship,

It changes the rest of the week:

We've practiced seeing God's people not as someone who can do something for us.

Not as a commodity, something to be used.

We practice seeing them as a sign of God.

Close your eyes: take a deep breath:

take in the fact of how much God enjoys you.

Just as you are.

Right now, this moment: God isn't interested in changing anything about you.

It's God's day of rest: right now: God is just taking time to enjoy you.

To take delight in you.

God smiles at the wonder, the difference, the uniqueness, the beauty of you.

Now open your eyes:

Look around you this morning at all these people who are here.

The people Here to rest and open their eyes to the presence,

To the message of God.

To hear God say, "Enjoy this community.

People together: living, loving, delighting in one another.

It is good. It is exceedingly Good.

Sail: to open us to movement in God's on-going creation.

In the Bible, the importance of worship was underscored in the 10 commandments.

God commanded the people to take off the Sabbath day for worship.

Pharaoh, in his military, industrial complex that was all about building more and more Bigger and better,

To this Pharaoh, Moses says: God wants us to go worship.

Pharaoh said no so many time, the implications of his no worship, no rest society

Came to pass: and all sorts of disasters ensued.

So when the people of Israel were set free,

They recognized that the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest

Put their minds right.

And even more, Sabbath keeping was an act of justice:

They would not make someone else slave away, while they took it easy.

Sabbath: a time to heal society. Time to be recreated.

To reestablish roles: We are not masters and slaves, haves and have-nots,

Insiders and outsiders.

Sabbath is us practicing a recreated world: where everyone is seen as created in God's image,

Where everyone is treated with dignity,

Where justice reigns, and even the animals get to rest.

So you've been to worship.

Pharaoh cannot dictate who you are anymore.

Listen to what Jesus has to say to you:

In a Charlie Brown world that says: Give us this day our daily bread"

Jesus says: Look at the birds of the air, the lilies of the field.

Take in the freedom. The beauty. The sense of grace as they are cared for by God.

Remember: God watches over us with wonder and providential love.

Troubles may come: like storms, wind, drought.

Remember whose you are. Remember how God looks at you with eyes of love and admiration.

Relax. Breathe.

Don't be anxious.

Don't feel as if you have to play God.

Have faith.

The creator who lovingly provides for the whole creation,

From flower to bird,

From bud to beak,

From depths to heights,

The length and breadth of all creation,

God is here:

God is here to care for us and all our loved ones.

Don't feel as if you have to be the responsible one in charge all the time.

It's the Sabbath: time to take a rest. Time to talk with God,

And let God speak to you of love, life, forgiveness, grace.

How you were and are created exceedingly good.

Take it in. Take God's message of love. Breathe it in.

Take in the wonder.

Then remember the one thing we truly can do in response.

We can say: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Amen

Sources:

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