

SERMON: Sunday –21 August 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Shabbat

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

We have Judaic roots. Our faith is rooted in Judaism.

Jesus was a Jew and never stopped being one. He didn't come to start a new religion called Christianity or any other name. He came to embody (to be) what it meant to be a child of God and show us how that's what we are too. He himself described it as coming to fulfil the Law and the Prophets not do away with it (Mathew 5:17).

And so we must embrace our Jewishness for as the song goes we are all children of Father Abraham.

Havy is Jewish, and has come to know Jesus the Messiah. She's got so much she could teach us about what this means and today I've asked her to say a few words about what Shabbat means to her.

I love the idea that the Sabbath be intended for setting people free, like the woman bound by infirmity for all those years.

I love the idea that the Sabbath be intended for healing people.

I love the idea that the Sabbath be intended for doing good things.

I love the idea that the Sabbath be intended for resting.

I love the idea that the Sabbath be intended for resting, knowing that we have a God who loves us, who sets us free, who heals us, who does good things for us, who gives us rest and who is infinitely approachable.

As today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews puts it,

It's not to a distant, angry God that we come but "to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant".

Or put another way earlier on in Hebrews 4 verse 16,
“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Jesus shines a new light on the Sabbath, a light that brings the concept of Sabbath to life, and reveals its true purpose.

I read a blog this week in which the writer, Rebecca Gordon, was speaking of how frustrating it can be to have a week of holiday only to return to all the stress that she left behind. In reflecting on that, she wrote,

Jesus never said come to me and I will give you rest, and then return back just to pick up those same burdens. No, Jesus said, “Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus changes one’s perspective, how we see things, hear things and understand things.

Here’s a wee reflection about that that I came across this week which reflects on the Gospel story. It’s called Perspective.

It’s about perspective:
how we hear,
how we see,
how we connect.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who looked up
and found a taxman
hidden in a tree
and invited himself for tea.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who heard a call from a busy pavement-side
from a man born blind
and was sought out and given sight.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who was challenged
by a woman who chose the table’s crumbs
and opened an invitation to Jesus
to talk of a bigger kingdom.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who sat down beside a child 'fallen asleep'
and asked for food for resurrection's first daughter.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who called out
to a man three days dead
and, between tears and weeping,
asked the dead-man walking to be unbound.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour who frees a woman
from a view of the feet of her neighbours
to being able to look them in the eye,
walking tall into a new way of living.

The gospel is about perspective:
of a Saviour silenced by death
and a tomb sealed by stone
and the end becoming a beginning.
It is all about perspective.

You will have noticed the reference to the crippled woman walking tall after her encounter with Jesus. No longer looking down at the ground but looking her neighbours in the eye in a new era of freedom, healing and rejoicing.

We might never experience such a dramatic conversion in which we can't deny the touch of Jesus at the root of the change. But the same Spirit of Jesus can work through all sorts of different ways of healing, setting free, resting and rejoicing; as we let the Spirit renew our minds.

I suppose it is all about our perspective. Yes our eyes are opened up to see the truth but we can also help by setting our minds on looking in the direction of faith, attributing the moment by moment coincidences in our favour to the hand of a loving God who has the best interests of all creation at heart.

Peter puts it like this,
By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence.

2 Peter 1:3

Peter goes on to explain that part of that divine promise is to share in the divine nature, to be one with God in all things.

Now that's a shift in perspective from what we knew in the past. That's a new take on an old way, just like Jesus bringing that fresh fulfilling revelation to the concept of Shabbat - setting free, healing, doing good, resting.

So which of these aspects of Shabbat will you seek today? Maybe it'll be all of them and more.

And as one way to do that I want to encourage you to seek prayer today after the service, through the back or where you're sitting. Prayer for anything at all but especially things to do with:

being set free from something
healing
doing a good thing or needing a good thing
Or simply, resting.

Sabbath is that means through which we can connect with the Source of Love and all the freedom and goodness that lies in oneness with the God who made all of Creation and holds it still.