



Bridging



November 2006

The Newsletter of the First Parish Church, Bridgewater, MA

Observing the Sabbath

Many Americans are finding themselves over-worked and over-committed. Electronic communications were supposed to make life easier, but they ended up making us all the more networked. We seem to abhor vacuums, because we keep taking on yet one more commitment. We not only task, we multi-task.

Some of my minister-colleagues have been discussing over-commitment. We've reminded one another of the importance of down time. Many of us have become all the more intentional about Sabbath observation: that is, periods intentionally devoted to reflection, renewal, perhaps rest. There's something to be said for the old "blue laws" that restricted Sunday sales, or for religious traditions that require strict adherence to Sabbath observation. Everybody needs down time on a regular and intentional basis. Even God got to rest on the seventh day: why don't we?

Do you take on a busy schedule, in your personal life, in your congregational life? I'm not calling you to lessen your commitment to First Parish, but I am calling you to evaluate how you are taking care of yourself. The last thing any congregation or organization wants is a membership of burned out people.

I call each of us—myself included—to Sabbath observance. Ideally Sabbath would be a complete 24-hours, once a week, when we refrain from "routine" activities, however we define them. Now, I can predict a response from many of you, especially parents of small children—"There's no time to take a break". My response back is the there's no time not to take a break: breaks are important, for church life, for family life, for personal peace. If a 24-hour Sabbath truly is not possible, then consider shorter periods. Even for an hour or two, claim time and space to suspend routine activities, to clear your mind, renew your body, and stand on your head to see the world from a new perspective. In addition to a weekly Sabbath, you might consider a short daily Sabbath—even ten minutes.

I admit it: I have a tendency toward "Type A". So I have become intentional about a weekly 24-hour Sabbath (see a note from me later in this newsletter). Periodically—every three months or so—I also want to be intentional to take retreats in totally different locations and routines. Time away means that during time present, I will be much more present.

Find your own best Sabbath practice: sharing a meal with someone you love, walking in nature, reading, meditating, praying, writing letters, keeping diaries, petting your cat, pruning your garden. Sunday morning at church might be part of your Sabbath regime, but be careful not to spend time at church "working" on church "business"—avoid "shop talk" during social hour is good practice. What's important in any Sabbath observation is that you are intentional and regular and engaged. Sabbath gets priority.

See you in Church!

Blessings,
Barbara

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January 2007

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"Welcoming the New Year"

As I write this column in mid-December, I am still in a "giving" mode, thinking ahead to presents I plan to give family and friends in a few days. I've never been materialistic at Christmastime. I know my best gifts to people I care about are offerings of myself, and not just one day but all year through. Still, there is a certain amount of franticness as I figure out the presents I do plan to give, especially to children in my family.

As you read this column in early January, you may be thinking not only about what you gave but also what you received—and perhaps also returned and exchanged. Isn't it heart-warming, when a certain gift is just the right thing? Gifts like that remind us about the importance of giving, during the winter holidays and all through the year.

I hope both your recent giving and receiving have been satisfying. I also hope your gifts have represented more than material value: that they have represented your love and your connections with those who matter to you. I often wish that the giving spirit of this time of year would last all year through, not because of the load of presents we could end up with but because of the messages of caring that giving represents. What would it look like if, rather than only once a year, we had a monthly giving holiday, a date with ourselves to be intentional about giving to others? I'm not necessarily talking about material giving—I also mean gifts of time, or good wishes, or moral support. These gifts wouldn't cost much, but their rewards could be great—stronger and deeper connections, lasting friendships, firmer family ties. As we enter a new calendar year, giving to this congregation also matters. This is already a very giving congregation. Many of you give much in time, talents, energy, and ideas. You also give materially, through annual pledges and special offerings. This church needs both types of gifts. Sometimes your time or energy is just right. Sometimes your financial support is the best gift.

In the coming months, there will be opportunities for you to demonstrate both types of giving. You will be called to give materially: a special Fair Share offering in January, and the annual canvass in March, for starters. You will also have a chance to give new ideas and projects: stay tuned for more about the new Stewardship Committee, whose work will include but encompass much more than the annual pledge drive. I hope it will be possible for you to maintain your giving level of the past. Maybe you can even think about increasing your giving, in your pledge or in your help on a project. Let the winter holidays just past serve as a reminder that for every gift given, much is also received.
Happy Holidays, January 2007!

See you in church!

Rev. Barbara

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