

## Devotion, Week of June 11, 2023

### Rev. Jeanne Simpson

We are finishing up our PW Bible study on Celebrating Sabbath. Carol Bechtel tells the story in the last lesson of a Jewish family's experience beginning Sabbath on Friday evenings. The mother lit two Sabbath candles (to represent the two versions of the commandment to keep Sabbath in Exodus and Deuteronomy) and recited a traditional prayer to welcome the Sabbath into the home. Then the father would come stand beside her and the children would step forth to receive a blessing. This ritual ended with the Aaronic blessing from Numbers: "May God bless you and keep you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace."

This beginning of Sabbath – with candles, prayer, and the blessing of children – is a reminder to us all that Sabbath is about rest, about slowing down, about breathing deeply, about holding on to traditions that have meaning for us, and about worship together. We celebrate Sabbath in worship together, because quite frankly, we desperately need each other, especially in today's world of nonstop business and a focus on scheduling every minute of our lives – even recreation or play dates. Bechtel says that "We can't grow alone. We need each other if we're going to survive and thrive."

Our worship follows a rhythm – we gather each week to reaffirm that we are resurrection people who have come once again to celebrate the Easter experience. We have an order to the service – we gather with a call to worship, a hymn of praise, a prayer of confession, and a declaration of pardon. We hear the scriptures read and the Word proclaimed, and then we affirm our faith and have intercessory prayer for one another, for the church, and for the world. We celebrate the Lord's Supper with thanksgiving for Christ's gift of himself to us. And then we sing a hymn and receive a benediction as we are sent out into the world for another week. We cannot do any of this alone – we are called to confess our corporate sin and to hear reassuring words of pardon. We are called to pray for each other. We are called to sing praises. We are called to listen to the Word and its message for us today. We are called to share the cup and bread with each other, as we, Christ's body, remember Christ's body broken for us. And then we are called to go out into that world that can be so unfriendly, fortified for a week in the secular world, knowing that we will gather again to celebrate Sabbath in the beloved community. Mary Ellen Wright wrote a wonderful poem about celebrating Sabbath:

Sabbath was made for our refreshing –  
Time to stand back from clatter and strife,  
Time to draw close to our God and our Maker  
And be refilled with His power and life.  
Thank You, Lord, for Sabbath resting,  
Thank You for this wondrous gift.  
Worshiping You in grace-filled abandon  
With hearts and voices in praises lift.  
Amen.

May your sabbaths be ones of celebration.

*Jeanne*