



SABBATH & WORK

A Return...Not An Arrival

April 28, 2024

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

Prelude – I Lose My Ability – Jonathon and Melissa Hestler
Welcome (Dylan)

CALL TO WORSHIP | Revelation 19:6-8

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Song #1 – The Lord’s Prayer (It’s Yours) by Matt Maher

Song #2 – No Longer Slaves by Johnathon and Melissa Hestler

Dismiss Kids

ANNOUNCEMENTS | Entering Awareness

ENTERING AWARENESS is meant to help us recognize what keeps us from living fully, being readily clothed in righteous deeds, the way of relating rightly with God, one another, and creation that we believe we can...because Jesus reigns and we live united to Him....

SERMON | A Return...Not an Arrival (Easter into In Between)

The ‘Hallelujah Banquet’ of Revelation 19, which _____ read for us as an invitation into worship today and which accentuated our Easter morning praise, is a glimpse of that future union. It's a vision we see at the end of what separates us from the source of Life, the end of what binds us in death. It's a vision seen at the beginning of intimate communion, a binding by covenant and love, the marriage of the Lamb and His Bride. It's an image of a Bride and union made ready for life, truly, thoroughly, and forever. This is what awaits us at “The end... [that] make[s] our beginning. [The] end from which we start.”¹

As we reflect on these post-Easter days, we realize that our start is a return. Life after Easter is a return. The vision of Revelation is a resurrection of the good and very good of creation amid the messiness of re-creation. A vision written, remember, to those like us, attempting to make a life good in a world in which Jesus was alive

¹ T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, 207.

but not seen. This vision becomes a reality for us as we enter the whole and holy cadence of making life good with God in Sabbath into Work into Sabbath into Work.... Within the bonds of marriage, we return to making ourselves a home in the life and love of God manifest (made real) among us, resting and walking with us in the gardens of our daily existence as John the Beloved has reminded us over and over this season:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, **so that we might live through him**. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins...By this **we know we abide in him and he in us**, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world...So **we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us**. God is love, and **whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him**. (1 John 4:9-10, 13-14, 16)

This is where we make a life, in the love of God, God with us, God for us. And while Easter weekend events marked the end of disunion, separation, isolation, and the beginnings to which we return, **our return is not an arrival**. We live today on the way, apprenticed to Jesus (learning how to make a life for ourselves, the skills, character, and nuances of our vocations), and yet pilgrims following Jesus on a path through today into forever. It's the tension force of being at home and on the way—given the responsibility to make a life here and commands to follow, go, sometimes in a direction unexpected or undesired—that stabilizes the tight rope of life, that is the compression of the narrow road, and is what the apostle Paul describes in “The Way of Love” chapter in 1 Corinthians:

For now, we see in a mirror dimly, **but then** face to face. Now I know in part; **then** I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. **So now** faith, hope, and love **abide**, these three, but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:12-13)

Here, at the midpoint of helping one another make life good within the life and love of God by Sabbathing and working through faith and hope, I think it is important for us to tighten the rope, make sure we are walking steady and stable on what we are after in these efforts and why.

Here, in the midst of the tension of apprenticeship and pilgrimage, of being home and not yet arriving, we are, as the Revelation described, **making ourselves ready for forever**, granted, gifted, freed to cloth ourselves in righteous deeds...

his Bride has **made herself ready**; it was **granted her** to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the **righteous deeds** of the saints. (Revelation 19:8)

Making ourselves ready for forever is what we are after in our yearly return to the after-Easter rhythms. Encouraging and equipping one another to take full advantage and responsibility for what has been granted us...a life of living well, rightly.

“...righteous deeds” is what John sees the Church covered in at the end. Righteous deeds in which we are given the freedom to ready ourselves as “saints,” those who cannot be described apart from their connection/union/marriage with God, are works done in right/proper relation to God’s person and purposes,

as well as, the results that come from relating to God, others, and the earth in such a manner. Let me say that again, righteous deeds are life lived in right/proper/congruent relation to God's person and purposes as well as the produce/fruit/results that proceed from living in such relation to God, others, and earth.

"Righteousness," says author and theologian Marilynne Robinson, "is a very important word in Scripture, too little considered by interpreters, perhaps...Righteousness is associated with **life that is not doomed to destruction**. It can save a city. It can save Creation. If one could imagine righteousness breaking into earth's saddest places, and among the exploiters of violence and poverty, one could anticipate the **stable, long-term flourishing of something that deserved to be called life.**"²

What we are after in this post-Easter season is preparing for forever today because that is how we are able to flourish, us and our neighbors, because that is what we have been given, gifted, in our freedom from what takes life. **Preparing for flourishing and forever in the responsibility of freedom** is why the dead and alive again and forever Jesus speaks the way he does to the churches in Revelation 2-3. Words meant to steady and stable the saints to make something that deserved to be called life...not doomed to destruction.

It's been a minute since the Letters of Lent, letters we didn't quite finish before Easter weekend's events. Yet I think it would be helpful to hear the final examinations of Jesus with the what and why of this post-Easter living at top of mind. Listen to what Jesus knows and encourages and what he knows and doesn't. Listen for what he calls His bride to do no matter what he sees, and presumes they have the freedom (therefore, ability) to do what he commands if they so choose:

The words of the Son of God... 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first...I do not lay on you any other burden...*hold fast to what you have* until I come.' (Revelation 2:18-19, 24-25)

The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. 'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. *Wake up*, and *strengthen what remains* and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. *Remember...what you received and heard. Keep it and repent*. If you will not...I will come against you.' (Revelation 3:1-3)

The word of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. 'I know your works...that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name...*Hold fast what you have...*' (Revelation 3:7-8, 11)

² Marilynne Robinson, *Reading Genesis*, 46.

The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot...you are lukewarm...I will spit you out of my mouth...Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so *be zealous and repent.*' (Revelation 3:14-16, 19)

Jesus is imploring His bride, our fore-sisters and brothers in the faith, the ones with whom we share a lineage, a history, and future, to not merely know and believe in the love of God, in the power of God, but to make themselves ready for forever, cloth their lives in what has been given them, and so make life good. Echoing Jesus' words and intent, the apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthian church and you and I, in this week's pastoral note, to do the same thing:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds [not good work!], he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed **you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel...**which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven...(Colossians 1:21-23)

The good news, the gospel, is that God is for us, God is with us, and we are therefore free to make life good, true, pure, and righteous. **We are freed, made able, and granted the strength to hold fast to what we have and remember, repent, keep it, and be zealous for it when our grip is weak, the tight rope feels lax, or the road is too broad.**

We've mentioned the Jewish Rabbi Abraham Heschel quite a bit over this last stretch. We would go further in our faith than he does, linking and grounding our heritage and future to Jesus. Still, his understanding of our shared lineage and foundations of faith:

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40)

...the ones who, as the author of Hebrews tells us, faith our faith makes perfect, complete, whole, is helpful. Listen to what he has to say about the essentials of what we have come to know and believe and a faith we are continuing to put on, are freed to clothe ourselves through our making life good:

"The most commanding idea that Judaism dares to think is that freedom, not necessity, is the source of all being. The universe was not caused; it was created. Behind mind and matter, order and relations, the freedom of God obtains...[gain by a planned action]

[As we said on Easter, the reason for hallelujah's universal tongue is that] We are taught not to feel accursed, to bear a sense of boundless guilt. We are asked to feel elated, bred to meet the tasks that never end...

...every person is obliged to feel that the world was created for their sake [in the interest of; in order to achieve or preserve your life]. Humanity is not the measure of all things but the means by which to accomplish all tasks.

[Your life has worth, yes, in your mere existence, your created-ness as an image bearer. But your value is not merely in your existence but in your participation, in the fact that God chooses to continue to make very good through you, me, and your neighbor.

Let the wonder of that sink in for a moment. Now listen to where this wonder and praise, worship and awe at God's intent and actions leads the Jews, and us in Jesus.]

As a free being the Jew must accept an enormous responsibility. The first thing a Jew is told is: You can't let yourself go; get into harness, carry the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. [An easy yoke, made to fit you perfectly through Jesus] ...bear loads of responsibility....abhor self-complacency...enjoy freedom of choice...[You've] been given life and death, good and evil, and [you're] urged to choose, to discriminate.

Yet freedom is not only the ability to choose to act, but also the ability to will, to live. [To hold fast, remember, keep, repent (turn and hold fast), wake up, and be zealous.]

The predominant feature of Jewish teaching throughout the ages is a sense of constant obligation."³

[The feeling and conviction of being more than just swept up into something, but of being needed for something, freed (able, competent) by God's granting, to do something good and lasting in every little thing we do and do not to make a life.]

Preparing for flourishing and forever is the responsibility of freedom and why faith and hope abide...why we can make life good through faith and hope in love—a love in which we abide and abides in us. In this way, continues Heschel...

"faith...is not a formula. It is an attitude, the joy of living a life in which God has a stake...being involved with God.

Such faith is... [not] acquired all at once or once and for all...It requires effort, stirring, strain, preparation [a waking up and zealousness].

It grows in awareness of mystery in prayer [holding fast, remembering], in deeds which transcend selfish needs [works of service].

It grows a life time to burst forth for single moments [in our *hallelujahs* and *amens*].

Faith implies striving for faith. It is never an arrival; always being on the way [vs. living on a reputation, becoming apathetic/lukewarm]...

Faith comes with the discovery of being needed, of having a vocation, of being commanded. [keeping a word...not denying a name...abiding in love]"⁴

Just as Jesus told His apprenticed pilgrims that first Maundy Thursday:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:9-11)

³ Abraham Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 13.

⁴ Heschel, 66.

GUIDED REFLECTION |

"This is the most important thought: God has a stake in the life of humans, of every human. But this idea cannot be imposed from without; it must be discovered by every person; it cannot be preached, it must be experienced."⁵

- How have you experienced God's "stake" in your life? His interest in and effort to order, achieve, and preserve your life.

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel...(Colossians 1:22-23)

- How/what is going on in or around you that makes continuing in the faith a struggle... that makes not shifting from the hope in the life and love in which you are free to make a life a precarious balancing act?

I know your works...your tribulation...where you dwell...
(Revelation 2:2,9,12,19; 3:1, 8, 15)

- How is Jesus encouraging today? Is Jesus inviting you to: hold fast, wake up, remember, keep, repent, and/or be zealous in making life good through faith and hope in His love and life?

⁵ Heschel, 12-13.

CORPORATE CONFESSION & COMMUNION⁶ |

LORD of Creation, create in us a whole and holy rhythm of life

composed of hours that sustain rather than stress, of days that deliver rather than destroy,
of time that delights rather than degrades.

LORD of Liberation, by the rhythm of your truth, set us free

from the bondage and baggage that break us, from the Pharaohs and fellows who fail us, from the plans and
pursuits that prey upon us.

LORD of Resurrection, may we be raised into the rhythm of your Life,

dead to deceitful calendars, dead to fleeting friend requests, dead to the empty peace of our accomplishments.

To our packed-full planners, **we bid, "Peace!"**

To our over-caffeinated consciences, **we say, "Cease!"**

To our suffocating selves, **LORD, grant our release.**

Drowning in a sea of deadlines and death chimes, **we rest in You, our lifeline.**

By your ever-restful grace, **allow us to enter your Sabbath rest as your Sabbath rest enters into us.**

For...

Jesus has done good work for us. The Holy Spirit is doing a good work in us.

And God our Father equips and calls each of us to go out and do good works, works he has prepared in advance
for us to do, and that he alone, **by his power and his Spirit, will bring to completion through us.**

For all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus.

That is why it is **through Jesus we utter our Amen to God for his glory. Hallelujah! Amen.**

Song #3 – Because of Your Love by Phil Wickham

Song #4 – Build My Life by Housefires

BENEDICTION | 1 Corinthians 13

As we rest in the day made for us, we prepare to enter into the work for which we are made
[**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering the reality in which we live:

Love covers the errors and faults of others.

Love trusts having confidence in the goodness of others.

Love lives towards its confidence with joy.

Love does so for the long haul,

enduring with courage and calmness.

So now, make yourself at home through faith and hope in love.

DISMISS

⁶ Adapted from *Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals*, 554, & *Every Moment Holy*, Vol 3, xv.