

Church, a few weeks ago I was ordained. July 14th, Bastille Day, not a conscious choice but interesting nonetheless, July 14th I was ordained into the Christian Ministry by the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, under the care of the Ohio region, at my childhood church First Christian Church of Stow, Ohio.

Because I had to do it right, and because I'm worth it, my ordination service was a three hour marathon of praising and preaching.

This is my first time preaching since then. You can take that as a warning or a blessing, I don't know, your choice.

I was ordained July 14th and the assistant dean of Disciples Divinity House, the right Reverend Yvonne Gilmore co-preached my ordination sermon and she was absolutely incredible. She's a spoken word artist and she gives a gravitas and flow to her preaching that my suburban church had never heard before. Although she clearly thought about what she had to say, it appeared to me that she might not be entirely reading off a manuscript but she was able to mix aspects of me, my love of community, my thesis, the scriptures I chose, the Hip-Hop concept of remixing, she was able to put me and my pastoral and theological throughlines into a powerful performance which comforted, taught and challenged the congregation and was just about the perfect ordination sermon.

And I can barely remember what she said.

You see, the week before my ordination I counseled a week of high school camp at Camp Christian, the camp ground where I first felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Actually, well maybe have to start before that. July 4th we barbecued and watched fireworks at the lake, July 5th and

6th my childhood best friend visited me in Chicago, and we did all the things good friends do when they catch up... we drank and we stayed up real late... and we went to museums! July 7th I woke up at 6:00 am to make the 6 hour drive to my campground in Ohio, I arrived right when the campers started arriving, and from that moment, I have to be on. I had to be totally present with the campers.

During that week I was teaching two classes, I had a cabin and table I had to watch, I helped the kids plan a end-of-the-week service, and our class curriculum was "Will of God" and "The Book of Job"... you know, light subjects. I had to be present for these kids through all of this.

But I also had to make sure everything was coordinated for my ordination, and I had to answer the many, many texts I am getting from people involved, music, preachers, speakers, presenters, and I had to do the bulletin, which God bless my partner for taking the helm on that adjusting it for the 50 different changes that various people wanted and it was a 3 hour service so you *know* there was a lot of moving parts.

Also, stupidly, I agreed to preach the morning of my ordination. Both the early service and the later service. So while counseling church camp I was organizing an ordination service and writing a sermon.

Folks I know what Yvonne preached, but despite all the advice from mentors and colleagues to "enjoy the day and be present in the moment" I don't really remember what Yvonne preached, and my ordination was on July 14th and it feels like just *now* I'm re-cooperating from it all.

At the end of my service, the feeling the seeped most through my body was *exhaustion*.

I feel, now, excited and renewed and enthusiastic, but I felt then only exhausted.

**\*breathe\***

In Leviticus there is a proclamation that every 50 years, there is to be a year of Jubilee.<sup>1</sup> A year in which slaves are released, debts are forgiven and the land lies fallow. No hand works the land, it lies barren and its harvest increases to make up for the time that it was not worked.

Jubilee is the ritualized practice of liberation. Liberation from servitude. Liberation from debts. Liberation from work. Liberation caused by a resetting - a righting of the world to the way things were ordained by God. The Jubilee was a reminder to the Israelites *whose* they are. They did not permanently own the land, for the land belongs to God. Jubilee works to liberate the people from their duties to each other, their servitude to the lands, their daily lives and their habituated ways of being.

Trocmé says about the year of Jubilee that it is an “expression of God’s justice, which occurs at regular intervals to regularize God’s relations with God’s people.”<sup>2</sup> Israel’s debt to God will not stack up indefinitely; accordingly debts between fellow Israelites must also be canceled periodically.”<sup>3</sup> The year of Jubilee was meant for a kind of resetting, a kind of renewal. Renewal and resetting which is *justice*. Justice and liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25: 1 - 12

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* pg. 67 - 68

Trocmé argues that when Christ declared liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and good news to the poor in Nazareth<sup>4</sup>, Christ was proclaiming Jubilee. Christ was proclaiming a reset, a renewal, liberation that had *real* social and physical effects. Christ was proclaiming renewal, liberation and justice.

Christ was proclaiming a transformation of how we live in the world and non-violent revolution.

Before Leviticus, before the proclamation of Jubilee, however, is Exodus, where the sermon text is from. Before the Israelites receive the proclamation of Jubilee, the Israelites must be liberated from their captors. In our exchange between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh, an exchange which punctuated by graphic and violent plagues unleashed upon Egypt, our sermon text finds us with a kind of peculiar plague.

A plague of darkness.

Sure, this plague would have been annoying, causing all of Egypt's production to stand still for three days. For a people who relied on natural light for the rhythms of daily life, total and utter darkness puts life to a halt. There is no commerce, nobody can work the fields, nobody can even go outside to visit one another. Everything must stand still in time. The way we interact with the world is undone.

But also, the plague of darkness caused the world to become a place of rest for the Israelites.

For three days the Israelites could rest. They had enough light to do what needed to be done in their own homes. Nobody could force them to work the fields. The Israelites were able to rest.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 4: 14 - 30

The Israelites were able to be renewed. It's hard for tired feet to march, but with just a little bit of respite tired feet aren't so tired. Broken spirits are mended, exhaustion turns into restedness. A rested body is an able body. A rested body is a renewed body. A rested body can become a liberated body.

Jubilee seeks that renewal. That restedness. That liberation.

Trocmé says that “the gospel ethic is one of renewal, for in the Old Testament tradition Jubilees were nothing less than religious awakenings.”

It's hard to take our rest seriously. The world, in so many ways, demands so many things of us. There exists the superficial demands of businesses, and entertainment, trying to command our attention and our dollars. The real demands of how we scrape our lives together, how we pay bills and put food on plates. The demands which make life worth living, friendships, stories, adventures, love, weddings, birthdays. The demands of folks whose lives are in turmoil are real and important.

And our holy creator also demands of us that we rest. God did not finish creation on the sixth day, but creation was finished when God sanctified the seventh day and *rested*. Divinely modeled for us and Divinely demanded of us, that we rest. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian says, “Every seventh day a miracle comes to pass, the resurrection of the soul, of the soul of man and of the soul of all things.”<sup>5</sup>

I believe Trocmé. I believe that Christ called the people at Nazareth, and calls us into Jubilee. Christ calls us into jubilee which means refreshing our relationships with one another, it means

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sabbath* pg. 83

we must find right relationship with God by ascending above our accustomed ways of being, if just for a while, and Jubilee means we are challenged to an ethic of renewal and religious awakening.

Church, you can't wake up if you never went to sleep.

We can't be liberated if we are too tired to move.

What would it mean for us to practice jubilee in our lives? To relieve ourselves of the debts we feel in our own souls? To rest long enough so that we can march to our liberation? To remit ourselves of the debt of energy and enthusiasm so that we can be in right relationship with each other and with God? To live into a gospel ethic of renewal and religious awakening?

Before the Israelites were able to march to freedom, they had to seize their opportunity God gave them for rest. For me to realize the calling and sending of my ordination, I had to find some time to rest. Before God completed creation, God *rested*. Heschel writes about the Sabbath "And the world becomes a place of rest. An hour arrives like a guide, and raises our minds above accustomed thoughts. People assemble to welcome the wonder of the seventh day, while the Sabbath sends out its presence over the fields, into our homes, into our hearts. It is a moment of resurrection of the dormant spirit in our souls."<sup>6</sup>

It is a beautiful thing to "take it easy", as I was told was the theme for this month. It is necessary, modeled for us by God, demanded of us by God, necessary for the resurrection of the dormant spirit in our souls.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Sabbath* pg. 10

Today, I'll go to Veggie fest, then I'll go home and try my hardest to let the miracle of Sabbath come to pass. I won't work on any of my work, I'm not going to be "productive" in the ways of accustomed thought. I'm going to let my metaphorical fields lay fallow.

I hope you will join me, in whatever ways you can. I hope that you will do the Jubilean act of "taking it easy."

After all,our Biblical text teaches us that rest was the completion of creation, and rest is the precursor to liberation.