



Roots, Wonders, and Woofies – One Woman’s Plan for Sabbath

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Yesterday evening I was out walking my dog and contemplating what I would write for this article, when I had a squirrel moment...literally. We had just turned up Squirrel Street (whose real name is 83rd but is known by us as a happening place for squirrels) when behold seven squirrels were before us. "Jelly!" (that's my dog), I exclaimed, "It's a holy manifestation of squirrels. And look there's a foo-foo (bunny) and a chipmunk too. The Lord has blessed you this evening."

Now perhaps you don't have these kinds of conversations with your dog, or at least not in public spaces, but they are a regular occurrence for us. Yet this sighting was particularly wonderful and serendipitous for me, as I had been struggling over what to write about sabbath and its importance.

As I complete seven years on the staff of the Milwaukee Presbytery, I am grateful to be going on sabbatical. It's a practice that is common in the academic fields of colleges and universities as well as for pastors, but feels foreign to most everyone else, and sadly, is not a shared practice for all. Its roots trace back to when God command the Israelites to take a year long sabbath from working their fields every seventh year, a practice that allows both the land and the people to rest and recuperate. Our current culture struggles with keeping a weekly sabbath (also one of God's commands), so the idea of sabbatical (even one that is three months not the full year) is confounding to many.

"What will you do?" is the question everyone has asked me when asking about my sabbatical, which is funny really, as the practice draws from the Biblical call for sabbath rest – the point being *not* doing, *not* producing. But culturally, we are *doers*. Our ability to work and produce is not only highly praised but also seen as a mark of value among us. Indeed, in preparing for sabbatical individuals are usually expected to provide a plan, which seems counterintuitive to the call for sabbath but on par for our cultural norms.

And yet, as I watched that holy assembly of squirrels, foo-foo, and chipmunk, I knew that is what they were doing – preparing. They had gathered under a large oak tree whose acorns were now adorning the ground. They were reaping the harvest and preparing their stores for the winter during which they will snuggle in their nests, warren, and burrow for their own season of sabbath rest. They plan it and work toward it every year in the same way God calls us to plan for it every week... and for those fortunate to observe it, every seven years.

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you...the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work... (Deuteronomy 5:12, 14)

I confess that I am not good at keeping a day of sabbath every week, and I'm not just referring to going for an hour or two to church and calling that good. The *day* I should dedicate to rest and renewal, if I am not working is spent catching up on chores, preparing for the week ahead—I am doing. Perhaps that is why I am so ready for this sabbatical, for time to let my body wholly let go of producing and see instead what God has in

store for me. But still, this has taken some planning and no small amount of trust that while I have shored up resources for this time, God has and will continue to provide.

I have entitled by sabbath plan Roots, Wonders, and Woofies. While I have not been good at whole scale sabbath taking, I have developed patterns of sabbath moments, most of which involve Jelly. On weekends or weekday evenings when the weather is nice, we take adventures to dog parks and nearby nature trails. She investigates all the smells, and I soak up the beauty of God's creation and her joy; then we get pup cups. The Wonders and Woofies portion of my sabbatical involves a great deal of these adventures. I have read up on parks and trails in Wisconsin and Michigan and learned from fellow dog parents great places to take Jelly and myself for new sights and smells. In addition, I'm looking forward to reading William P. Brown's *Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World* as well as *Journeys in Genesis: Unveiling Migration Stories in the Bible*, a collection assembled by Ted Hiebert and Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, which I hiked last summer with my dad. I have a treasure trove of books on gardening and a lush harvest of fall raspberries waiting in my backyard. And I will be delving into my own roots, the stories of my family, through visits with relatives and friends I haven't seen in years and trips to places that birthed my parents, grandparents and greats. I have plans, but I also have expectations. For what? I don't know- only that this space will allow for God to speak to me and for me to hopefully not be so full up with doing that I can actually hear.