

June 2, 2024.

Pr. Steve

Texts: Deuteronomy 5: 12-15; 2 Corinthians 4: 7-12; Mark 3: 1-6

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I had a friend named Lou Satz, who was Jewish. In order to get into the Army at the end of WWII, he lied about his age—he was only 17. He got assigned to Europe, in one of the Eastern European countries, outside of a Concentration Camp that had been liberated. (I don't know the name of it—there were so many of them.)

He's at the Army base. It's Friday night, on guard duty, when the Sergeant came to him and said, *'Don't your people worship on Friday nights?'* And Lou said, 'Yes, sir.'

'Well, shouldn't you be attending worship at the camp?'

And Lou said, 'I'm not practicing, Sir.'

'Still, I think you should go.'

'Well, I've got guard duty here, Sir.'

Sarge said, *'I'll cover it. You go.'*

'But I don't have a vehicle, Sir.'

The Sergeant tossed him his keys and said, *'Take my Jeep.'*

So, Lou went. The congregation gathered in a concentration camp just recently liberated—for the first Shabbat service in years. Lou is standing in the back, trying to hide away. He's in his uniform. The congregation notices, sends word up to the Rabbi.

"Young man, you join me right here at my right-hand side, the place of honor. We need you here"—which is where he was for the whole service, the first Shabbat in years. (And we can all barely imagine the power of that celebration of liberation.) And afterwards, Lou was besieged with hugs and kisses and tears.

Years passed, 12-15, something like that. Lou gets into the publishing business in New York City. It was the habit on Friday afternoons to have Happy Hour with the whole staff—and usually a new author who is getting published—a celebratory occasion. And at the conclusion of that Happy Hour, one of the staff was appointed to be the host to make sure that the Guests of Honor would be escorted to the event on time. Staff had cleared out—Lou got the assignment. He was cleaning up, the author is there, they began chatting, and then the author said, *'I know you!'* And Lou said, 'I, I don't know you.' The author said, *'You were that young man at our Shabbat service in the concentration camp, weren't you?'* Lou said, 'Yes, I was.' *'You have no idea what your presence meant to us that Shabbat.'* The author's name was Simon Wiesenthal, who became the foremost Nazi Hunter after World War II, and he and Lou remained friends the rest of their lives.

We have no idea what is happening in Sabbath celebrations, Sunday after Sunday.

A few years ago, Rabbi Dan and I offered another one of our classes in a series that we'd done with Beth Chaim over the years. But when we announced it, we said very clearly, *'This is the most radical material we can teach you. And we already know that it will also be the smallest class we ever teach.'* And we were right—because people know if we begin to practice this rhythmic rest, things will change, things will be asked of us with this simple and ancient practice of resting—giving up manic speed for one day, or for one period of time on a weekly basis—to let go of all that is overwhelming us, to allow ourselves to trust for a moment that life is good,

and that we can bask and savor in what we call the ordinary, which is actually the immense extravagance of it all. And we get to be here.

And we forget. We forget again and again and again, because we do not allow ourselves to be nourished at the roots of our being, from whence we can begin to enjoy life.

'Oh my God! Oh my God, what a concept—if we actually enjoyed our lives. Don't make me go there!'

And out of the joy, we—not somebody else—we confirm, begin to discover Wisdom, which is the most desperately thing that's needed these days. But will we honor wisdom? Because here's the truth. It comes to us by resting when we give up all the damnable pushing to fix everything. But by resting—as you remember, God rested at the completion of creation—Wisdom has the opportunity to rise up quietly from within us— of all people—within us.

Worship is not about attendance, it's about attentiveness to the Spirit. Remember the Sabbath. Keep it holy. Rest and relax in ocean-like, all-pervading compassion. Sabbath is all about pampering our souls. Should we resist it? Why do we resist it?

Jesus, in the Gospel story, goes to Temple on Shabbat. Pharisees are there. Got him. There's a guy with a withered arm and they're hoping, just hoping to 'set the trap'. '*Maybe he'll cure him. And then we'll have more evidence, more ammunition to tear him down*'—religious authorities using sacred Sabbath practice as a weapon. (Religious people are good at these things, twisting and turning and distorting gifts into weapons.)

Jesus sees the man and has him come front and center. Now there is nothing more terrifying for human beings than to be front and center. (Even in this congregation, if I ask Nancy to step forward, she's going to [ask] 'Why? I don't really know what these people are going to do to me.')

So, Jesus asks the most vulnerable person in the gathering to come front and center, and they are staring at this man with the withered arm. And Jesus asked the question of the authorities, '*Is it permissible on the Sabbath to do good or evil? Is it lawful to heal, or to kill on the Sabbath? And the authorities said nothing.*' [Mark 3: 4].

And that is the devastating, devastating, crisis of not only that story but our times.

Those who complain, and whine, and blame, who condemn, who can deny, who manipulate, who have no integrity, who are willing to deceive ad nauseam when confronted in the public eye with telling the truth, say nothing. And that's how evil works—saying nothing. And Jesus is outraged. The text actually says he was offended by their obstinate stupidity. (That's in the Bible, which is why people don't want to read it.)

And so, in one and the same moment, Jesus simultaneously commits a crime and heals by saying, '*Stretch out your arm*'. What do you think the authorities thought as they saw that arm point towards them? Were they grateful and filled with joy that their brother had been healed? Of course not. They were made bitter and found new ways to catch Jesus. Hardness of heart—the strangest and most painful thing of the whole Scriptures starting you may recall, with the story of the Pharaoh back in the days of Egypt. His heart grew harder and harder and harder. No matter how much grace and wisdom was presented to him, the heart simply grew smaller and harder and harder. This is inexplicable. (And all of us have had hard hearts at different times too, haven't we? What a mercy that we've come through it!)

Well, a fairly short period of time after this, Jesus, too, was condemned—to stretch out his arms for the crime of mercy. Mercy is criminal activity in our world.

I was with Lois the day before she died, in her home. She's on her deathbed. We had conversation for a time, and then Eucharist. She had trouble swallowing, but she insisted on taking the tiniest morsel of bread, and the tiniest sip of water, and then we had a time of silent prayer.

And then she said, “*Christ is risen.*” And I said, “*Christ is risen indeed.*”
And after a little while she said, “*You know, I couldn't come to Easter worship this year.*”
I said, “*I know, but now Easter is coming to you.*”

Remember the Sabbath. Keep it Holy.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.