

**11 Pentecost
August 8, 2021**

**In the name of the God of all creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the spirit.
Amen.**

As most of you know, tomorrow, Caren and I, along with our two dogs, Micah and Karma, begin an adventure in our twenty-two-foot recreational vehicle. We will begin a roughly three months' "sabbatical" ... yes, "sabbatical" in quote marks ... that will take us to visit family and friends, old haunts and new vistas, valued mentors and neglected memories. We expect it to be a "Sabbath-time," and a time of R&R ... Rest and Recreation ... Rest and Re-Creation.

We will begin by visiting my son, Christopher, in Lumberton, North Carolina. He turns fifty-one years old today, so we will celebrate his birthday with him ... being mindful of the strict limitations that this latest COVID surge has imposed upon all of us. From there we will wind our way to Chicago ... son Evan, daughter-in-law Robyn, and granddaughter Lucy ... then another winding journey to Albuquerque, New Mexico ... visiting daughter Jamie, son-in-law Neal, and grandchildren Jax, Marion, and Eldon ... and our granddaughter Andie will fly in from Seattle with her husband, Brian. As with many of you, it has been too long since we have seen these loved ones.

We'll be back in St. Augustine briefly in late September before officiating at a niece's wedding in Virginia in early October. Then we'll head up to Maine and drift down the East Coast and return to St. Augustine in late November ... and to St. Cyprian's for the First Sunday of Advent.

At least that is our plan as of this morning ... that may change by this afternoon. COVID will play a big part in where we go and who we greet along the way. And so will Kairos.

You've heard me speak about this before, but the ancient Greeks had two words for the concept of time ... "Chronos" and "Kairos." "Chronos" is the kind of time that is measured with a clock and a calendar. "Kairos" on the other hand is the kind of time that is more organic ... like when the apple is ripe ... or when the fall colors will peak in Vermont. "Chronos" is very helpful for making a doctor's appointment ... although, at times, it may feel like the doctor may have lost their watch. But I've also learned that for some families "Kairos" best describes when a wedding will start. If the invitation says the ceremony will begin at 1pm on Saturday, that really means that nothing will start before then, but the wedding will take place sometime that afternoon.

Anyhow, for our journey, we are making room for "Kairos," even as we schedule some things in "Chronos" on the calendar. We are making room for the Spirit to send us in unplanned directions, both on the road and in our hearts. We know where our major stops are, and when

we plan to be at those waypoints ... but the vistas in between ... and the time it takes to drink them in ... are up to the Spirit.

This “sabbatical” is also Sabbath-time for both me and Caren. It is also time for re-creation.

I grew up with an understanding of “Sabbath” as the day of the week that God “rested” and therefore we should “rest” then as well. Often, that meant going to church, possibly followed by a brunch, and for my family, it often meant a trip to a museum, or the zoo, or a Broadway matinee. My father did not work on Sunday, and almost all the stores were closed because of “Blue Laws.”

For an observant Jew, however, the Sabbath is very different. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday with prayers and the lighting of candles. From that point until sundown on Saturday evening ... which ends with prayers ... one can do nothing that is considered work. That means turning on a light switch, driving a car, or playing a computer game.

I don’t know how many of you are aware of this, but almost all new electric stoves have a Sabbath feature built into them. Look on your stovetop for the letter “K” which stands for Kosher. This feature allows an observant Jew to set the oven to stay on at a certain temperature for more than twelve hours. Jews are not allowed to cook something from raw ingredients on the Sabbath, but one can cook a dish before Shabbat begins, then keep it warm in the in the oven.

With the proliferation of Smart Home devices this feature for ovens is becoming obsolete. However, there is now a vigorous debate among rabbis about whether telling Alexa to turn on the TV on Shabbat is Kosher.

However, I learned something very special about Shabbat from Caren’s mother Muriel ... Muriel of blessed memory. As Caren was growing up Muriel was living a difficult life. She had issues with alcohol, drugs, mental health, and an emotionally abusive marriage. After she divorced Caren’s father she met and married a wonderful man who gave her a dream life ... until his sudden and unexpected death. In her grief Muriel easily could have retreated into alcohol and drugs ... she knew them well. Instead she decided to re-claim her Jewish heritage. She moved to a mostly Jewish neighborhood in South Florida and began studying with a rabbi at the local synagogue.

Not long after Caren and I married we visited Muriel in her garden apartment in Del Ray Beach. Her porch was filled with houseplants and as I was admiring them I noticed that there was flatware stuck in some of the pots ... a knife in a philodendron, a spoon in a violet, a fork in a cactus. Thinking it had to do with a means of nurturing the plants, I asked Muriel about them. She told me that when a utensil was ritually contaminated by using it in a non-Kosher way, such as using it with both meat and dairy. In this case the utensil was to be buried in dirt for a specific time before it could be used again. Since Muriel didn’t have a plot of land to bury the utensils, she stuck them in her flower pots.

What was most telling about Muriel understanding about Shabbat was how she ended it during the winter when her beloved figure skating events were scheduled to come on TV at five pm ... before the sun had set. Muriel would say her prayers to end Shabbat with the sun shining in her windows, then turn on the television and watch the skaters gracefully slide across the ice.

In justification she said, "I could be righteous and follow the rule of law, or I could be faithful and live by the intention of the law. I think Hashem ... Hashem is a nickname for God ... I think Hashem would like to see me joyful on Shabbat."

What I learned from Muriel was that Shabbat was not about all the things you were not allowed to do on the Sabbath, but rather all of what one could experience if they de-cluttered their life for a day, and allowed the world to just be. She taught me that Sabbath-time was about being open to the holy and sacred experience of making room for God to visit in even the smallest of ways. It is my hope and prayer that I ... that Caren and I ... may honor the blessed memory of Muriel during this Sabbath-time of our sabbatical by giving room for the world just to be.

Secondly, about R&R ... Rest & Recreation ... Rest & Re-Creation.

Earlier this week, as Caren was going through some old files, she found an announcement about an event in Cleveland in 1988. She started to throw the piece of paper away, when she noticed something handwritten on the other side. It was a letter she wrote to herself ... a journal entry of sorts ... from April 28, 1988. Here is what it said:

Friday – April 28

Made decision to go through with OB project – called Maine & actually parted with the 1st \$140 to make myself "miserable" for 11 days. Actually I view it as a great adventure – a chance to push myself & determine once & for all what is inside me I'm looking for. Sometimes I feel like I've got early Alzheimer's – that I've misplaced an essential part of the natural growth process. I know it's in there somewhere – I just can't figure out where the hell to look. Maybe if I conquer some superficial fears & doubts I will find the heavy duty ones that block progress – that block discovering what should be "the next step" – what priorities & goals will truly make me happy in the long run. In any event – I've taken the 1st step. In many ways I feel very selfish – all that money – but I know it's cheaper than many other routes you can take to find out why one is where one is at.

Right now, the sailing sounds like hard work & fun. The rock climbing sounds like something you just gotta do to do – but the ropes – even with a harness – they sound deadly – I'm scared to death of getting up on top of trees. What will probably happen is that part will be easy & the rest ... oy, oy – 40 days to get in shape!!

The "OB project" Caren spoke of was the Outward Bound sailing expedition off the coast of Maine. Outward Bound offers outdoor adventures that push limits ... mostly for teens and young adults.

Caren lived in Cleveland and her daughter, Jamie was acting out. She received the Outward Bound catalog to send Jamie on an Outward Bound trip to get her “fixed.” I was living in North Carolina at the time. I received an Outward Bound catalog because my oldest son, Trace, was acting out, and I was going to send him off to get fixed.

However, in the catalog, there was sailing expedition off the coast of Maine for adults over 40 ... the first time Outward Bound offered something like that to mature ... or what they thought were mature ... adults. As you heard from Caren’s journaling, she decided to go to Outward Bound instead of sending Jamie. I decided to go to Outward Bound instead of sending Trace. Rather than trying to “fix” our kids, we decided to “fix” ourselves.

That Outward Bound sailing expedition ... thirteen people for eleven days in a 30-foot sailboat with no cabin, no galley (kitchen), and no head (toilet) ... is where Caren and I first met. Our first night on the water Caren and I shared “anchor watch” ... staying awake while other slept like sardines in a can across the midline of the boat. We watch under a star filled sky as dawn began to break at 4am.

We sailed in Penobscot Bay, and ventured out into the Atlantic where we could see no land or other vessels. We spent three days on an island ... each of the eleven of us on a different island ... with nothing more than a gallon of fresh water and a handful of GORP ... Good Ole Raisins & Peanuts. We climbed on rocks, and rappelled down cliffs, and tightrope walked in the tops of trees. And we learned about ourselves. We began a process of re-creation. Caren said it best in her journaling:

Maybe if I conquer some superficial fears & doubts I will find the heavy duty ones that block progress – that block discovering what should be “the next step” – what priorities & goals will truly make me happy in the long run.

That is the re-creation I seek ... even if I am 77 years old.

People have asked about our Recreation Vehicle. It is a tiny house built into a Ford Transit vehicle ... the size of an Amazon Prime delivery truck. It has a bed, stovetop burner, a refrigerator, a microwave oven, a toilet and shower. It is outrageous luxury compared to the 30-foot wooden sailboat we shared with a dozen other people thirty-plus years ago. But it is our re-creation Vehicle as well.

This COVID pandemic ... which seems to be far from over ... has been a testing ground for all of us this past almost 18 months. Caren and I were not spring chickens when we met in 1988, but all of us were different people thirty-plus years ago. Our testings have come in different forms at different times ... some with joyful outcomes ... some with painful memories. But they have been the stuff of our re-creations ... yours and mine.

Caren and I leave with the full expectation ... with desire and intentionality ... that our sabbatical will be a time of re-creation for each of us and for us together. It is my hope and prayer that in the space of this Sabbath-time we will all find something holy and sacred that has been hidden in the clutter of life. My hope and prayer is that we ... what we call St. Cyprian's ... will know a holy and sacred re-creation in this time as well.

I end with the blessing I use often ... a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld:

For all that has been ... Thanks!

For all that will be ... Yes!

Amen.