

“Sabbath Lessons”
EpiphanyC-05 – February 7, 2010

Preaching Text: *“And I said, ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’” (Isaiah 6:5)*

Well, it’s the Sabbath again, which for me always marks the dividing line between the week past and the week to come. It also offers the welcome opportunity to review the events of the previous Monday through Saturday, to let it all settle in, to discern its meaning within the context God’s transcendent calm.

Considering time, we human beings, for convenience sake, divide it into manageable chunks – by the week, day, hour, minute. Though helpful, such divvying up of our lives does present a few problems.

Rather than experiencing time as God does, as organic and interconnected, we tend to spilt our world into tiny bits of isolated, disconnected reality.

In truth, absolutely everything that is, time included, is saturated with the sustaining, interconnecting power of God’s creative will. Nothing *merely* exists, precisely because everything has come into being through God’s will, and endures within the shimmering light of the divine gift of existence.

But as Monday turns into Tuesday, as the new week trends away from the Sabbath past – our centering point in time – our attention invariably is drawn to the “pieces” of disconnected reality, chunks of life rendered random and meaningless.

As we move, in effect, away from God, we seem to lose our way, unable to see the proverbial forest before the trees. We are tempted to filch the jumbled bits of reality and rearrange them so they obey our wishes, rather than God’s, functioning as mere fodder for our own ego-centric purposes.

Reality thus is stripped of its rightful purpose and severed from its most primal connection, to God; the basic relationship between Creator and creature is distorted, as creature masquerades as Creator – which, at heart, defines Original Sin.

In the cubism movement of the early part of the 20th century, most closely associated with Pablo Picasso, artists would take a scene and chop it up into pieces, then rearrange the pieces to form a new subjective whole.

The idea is that there is no inherent meaning or purpose to life, no ordering whole, but only that which the artist's unique, idiosyncratic vision chooses to impose upon it.

It's as if we were to attempt a jig-saw puzzle while ignoring the picture on the box. The implication is that there is no objective reality requiring the pieces to fit together as a logical whole. The original vision of the creator is displaced by the player's random rearrangement of its constituent parts.

In theological circles, time is thought of in two distinct ways. One way is *chronos*, a Greek word that refers to sequential, chronological time. The other is *chairo*s, also a Greek word, which suggests a timeless sort of time.

Chronos has to do with the time we measure with clocks, broken up into pieces, while *chairo*s has to do with the *holy*, the 'wholly other,' time that cannot be cut up or measured, time that is infused with God's otherworldly presence.

Chairos is what Isaiah experiences in the temple, as he's confronted with God's holiness, with whole, timeless time. And in its ineffable light, he sees himself for the first time as he truly is.

I imagine Isaiah, suddenly in God's mystical presence, recognizing at once his self-centeredness, and his all-too-human temptation to control reality. Duly confronted by the One who creates and sustains all things, whose design for all of life vastly exceeds his ability to grasp, Isaiah falls on his knees.

I imagine him admitting with sudden clarity and insight his radical creatureliness, as well as his radical dependence upon the God without whom life necessarily is small and incoherent. For without the Sacred Artist's holy vision, reality is all but unintelligible, a jumble of abstract, disconnected parts.

Only within the piercing light of God's ineffable holiness is Isaiah readied to approach life, with its many constituent parts, as a unified whole, a whole conceived and ordered by his Lord and Maker.

The origins of our observance of the Sabbath are well-known, found in the mythological creation story in Genesis. There God creates the heavens and the earth, and all of life contained therein, and on the seventh day rests. The Sabbath is that seventh day.

Therefore, on the Sabbath day, we, too, rest. And in our rest we concede that it is God alone who controls life, for the sun, we know, continues to rise and set, the world continues to spin on its axis, even as the rich complexities of life continues forth, all without our having lifted a finger.

With this awareness, the Sabbath also grants us the sacred privilege of encountering God's holiness. Cradled by the same timeless time Isaiah powerfully witnessed, we, too, admit our creatureliness, admit our futile attempts to rearrange the stuff of this world to suit our own purposes, and allow henceforth only God's vision, God's purposes for our lives and world. Amen.