

Here's a great idea I saw this week about that wonderful gospel, when Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah.

A commentary I read suggested that the preacher stand in the pews encouraging the congregation to turn and say to one another: "God gives us no other day than today to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and new beginnings to all who have failed."

Amen! There was a time when I could totally see myself rocking that idea. I could've probably managed to adapt it to this livestream format. *IF* I wanted to.

But I don't want to.

I really try to never preach anything that I myself am not willing to embrace. I try to preach the good news that I myself need to hear in that moment hoping that someone else – *you* maybe – might need to hear it too.

I confess that I'm not there right now with the message of seizing the day like a ball of fire.

Proclaiming good news to the poor? Great idea.

Release to the captives and sight to the blind? Sure.

Freedom to the oppressed?

All good and important and I know that's what we as Christians are to be about.

But right now, forgive me, Jesus . . .

the spirit's kinda willing, but the flesh is totally pooped.

Honestly, the only part that resonates with me today is that promise of "new beginnings to all who have failed."

I suppose I should be embarrassed to admit this.

But we know that Jesus was human too.

This very passage we heard follows Jesus spending forty days of temptation and preparation in the wilderness.

And after this, well, we read of times when Jesus was spent, stepped backed, and had the good sense to pray.

How could we dare presume anything less for our frail human selves?

I'm thinking that today's other readings back me up.

That famous passage from I Corinthians where Paul describes the body of Christ, each member, however humble, vital and valuable.

Even the "weaker" are *indispensable*.

That first reading from Nehemiah (now that's a book we don't hear often enough) addressed to people, shell-shocked,

just coming out of exile, literally rebuilding.

And what's the first thing they do? Immerse themselves in the Word of God.

*Weep*. And look for joy in the Lord, their strength.

This week Miss Frances and I attended (virtually, of course) a conference for Christian formation leaders.

We've not had a chance to debrief, but I can tell you that the part I hope will stay with me is the workshop "Micro-Sabbath: Refreshing and Refilling our Tanks One Minute at a Time."

"Micro-Sabbath" is premised on the idea that we're not made to run on a hamster wheel six days a week

only to connect with divine sanity on but the seventh.

Or even just a dedicated time of Morning Prayer at the start of the day.

We are made by God to welcome Sabbath moments into our lives *throughout* the day.

I was so taken by the presentation (by the Rev. Greg Farrand of a ministry called Second Breath) that I immediately googled them and got the app.

(Yep, there's an app for that!)

As helpful as the presentation was, and as impressive as the app seems,

here's what hooked me: The fine print along the bottom which says,

*"Great outer work arises from great inner work. We cultivate both."*

Simple, right? Common sense.

And yet, we live in a culture that mostly celebrates outer work, at any cost.

A culture which tells us that we are defined by what we do.

Yes, it's very nice to do and accomplish things, especially for others. Certainly Jesus accomplished a lot in his short life, and calls us to walk the way of love with him.

**AND** . . . Jesus also proclaims that God loves us for who we are. That the divine is in our very being, not just our doing. God is with us in our waking and our sleeping, and those hazy times in between. God in Christ Jesus longs to engage us in deeper inner work trusting that the outer work will happen in and with and through him. (Once again, it's not all about us.)

I pray that someday soon I can stand up with a straight face and challenge us to the urgency of decisive action to join Jesus in turning this broken world right-side up.

It is a message we need to hear.

But we've got to be honest about where we are right now in Month 23 of a global pandemic in which we've been forced to rethink and reinvent every aspect of our lives almost every day.

Speaking very personally, this latest omicron surge, being thrown back to livestreaming in an empty church, if only for a few weeks, has taken considerable wind out of my sails.

For most of us, this extended time of pandemic may appear to have been "quiet" in a conventional sense.

But, if we're honest, it's been a constant white noise roar of stress and anxiety and uncertainty – for twenty-three months, and counting. It's all a bit much.

And if you've not dared let yourself admit (even to yourself) just how exhausted you are,

I invite you to do so today.

It's ok. It's healthy to recognize when you've hit a wall.

It's a great first step toward that great inner work we sorely need.

Here's something we did at that online Micro-Sabbath workshop this week.

The presenter, Greg Farrand, stopped talking,

took a deep breath, and invited us to do the same.  
And, although I was multitasking trying to listen to the workshop on my laptop while answering a few emails on my phone, I suddenly had the good sense to play along. I put down my phone, got comfortable in my chair, and took that deep breath. I hope you'll do the same right now. Go ahead. Please. Just for a moment (*it's micro*).  
Pause everything else, get comfortable, take a deep breath.

Now, remembering the beautiful Biblical call to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. . .  
Gently touch your head. . . Your heart. . . Open your hands, your everything . . .  
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Might this be the sort of great inner work you need right now?  
It is the place from which great outer work can arise.  
Let's cultivate both.  
With God's help, let's cultivate both.

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