

Hashiveinu: Turn Us toward You
September 27, 2009

Shabbat shalom. Greetings of Sabbath peace.

Wouldn't it be good if on occasion—say, at least once a week—we greeted each other in this spirit, to remind ourselves and each other of the need to experience quiet, peaceful, and reflective Sabbath? Wouldn't it be good if we could incorporate this practice into our lives at the top of this new church year, which is already so filled with work and to-do lists?

Indeed, for many of us here at Wildflower Church, these are hectic times. If you're serving on the building committee, the stewardship committee, the committee on ministry, or the building steering committee, for example, it might be that your spouse, or your child, or your pet, or your very house, has begun to forget just what you look like. If you happen to serve on more than one of those committees, which some do, your home and family may be at times but a foggy memory for you;

and if you happen to have a partner who serves on one or more of these committees as well, you *might* be so lucky as to pass each other at your front door, remark, “I *know* I know you...” then wave as you go your separate ways. Things are that busy.

And, of course, that’s just here at church. For parents of young children, there is school to balance with your own lives, along with band practice, swim meets, piano lessons, soccer games, and a variety of other events. For many of us, work, or the lack thereof, takes up much of our time and energy, creating little hairline cracks in our serenity, whether we are working far too many hours for our own wellbeing, or far too many hours have been taken away from what was once steady employment.

Tied to work and family are energy- and time-consuming concerns about health and health care. Just over a month

ago, over sixty people attended small group meetings, known as house meetings, right in this space, after a service one Sunday, to explore the question, “How is the current health care system affecting your life?” We found that themes such as high cost of insurance, crowded emergency rooms, not being able to afford including dependents on our health care plans, having to skimp on medications, insurance companies denying service to people with pre-existing conditions, and coverage being too tied to place of employment, we saw these themes rise to the surface in those house meetings again and again.

So, whether it’s work, or school, or our health, or, lest I forget, our *relationships*, with ourselves and with each other, all of these important parts of our lives demand our attention, even while Wildflower Church gathers speed toward a successful stewardship campaign, a new church-wide

covenant of right relations, and toward, yes, perhaps our greatest mission *nearly* impossible yet, a home of our own.

Even for those of you whose lives may *not* be so busy, or who are new to this community, perhaps there's the sense of others rushing by you, like commuters in a subway station on their way to very important business as they forget, perhaps, that some of the most important business of all is connecting to and creating beloved community, with *you*. Where is the sense of fellowship? you might ask. Where are the days when we just sat together over coffee after church and *talked*? Where is the *resting* in each other's company? To borrow from Mary Pipher's vignette, in all the hustle and bustle, why are we speeding by that violinist playing his beautiful music unnoticed?

As a partial response to those questions, I want to share with you all that a lot of Wildflower people are working so hard

and are so busy, in order that some day, somewhere around that long, slow curving corner called time, we will land in a home of our own, where our Sunday mornings will not be limited to the hours our rent affords us, but will stretch comfortably into afternoons, just as we will stretch comfortably in church chairs that invite us to sit in them for more than an hour or two. I want to assure you that our church home will someday provide space enough for a variety of classes and meetings and musical performances to co-exist, so that we can run into one another in the hallway and say, “Hey! You’re here! I’m here, too!” and just love the fact of our shared, unhurried presence—resting in the spirit of Shabbat shalom.

More immediately, while *this* good place is still our home, I want to assure you that this year’s stewardship campaign is just about half way done and will be done all the sooner if you

get your pledges in, and that the Committee on Ministry, with help from many of you, has happily completed the first draft of the church-wide covenant. In other words, major goals are on their way to getting checked off our to-do list. We can celebrate. We can rest.

Still, just as the turning of the seasons is upon us, so more to-dos will be added to our lists. And more people will be sought to help with the good work. And while doing that good work, more people will struggle with how to strike a sense of balance in their lives. And if we're not intentional about striking that balance, with all this busyness and to-do-ness, we will, I'm almost certain, get cranky.

And that's the crux of my sermon today: Preventing crankiness, and all that might follow in its wake. And not *just* crankiness. For crankiness is merely one manifestation of over-work or over-stress. There is also the temptation to

despair, to disappear, to abdicate, to adopt the magical thinking that little Wildflower fairies will get it all done for you, and so on.

But as tempting as those paths may be, I will remind myself and you once more that we are all we have. And I mean that not in an *isolated* sense that it's us against the world, but in the *interdependent* sense that those who come to Wildflower Church *are* Wildflower Church. And so we must work together, both to get the work done, and to not *over-work*.

Within that endeavor, then, what do we do to keep ourselves and each other peaceful, healthy, and whole? What do we do, in the words of our mission statement, to “joyfully nurture one another in our lifelong spiritual journeys,” especially when the ride might seem a little rough?

It's good timing, I believe, that we are striving—whether at home, at work, in school, in our partnerships, or at

church—that we are striving to get so much work done right as we enter into the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, also known as the day of atonement. Just as last week I spoke of Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year, as being a time to mindfully practice covenantal relationship with one another, now we can take the time to *proactively* explore that litany of atonement Anna shared with us earlier, as a means of reminding ourselves of what can happen when we do not practice care. Remember that litany? “For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love... for each time we have struck out in anger [read: crankiness] without just cause, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love... for losing sight of our unity, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.”

By sharing this litany of atonement, I'm not implying that there is already much atoning to be done here at Wildflower Church. I am suggesting, instead, that the more mindfully we journey forward, the more mindfully we seek balance in our lives and incorporate into our lives the spirit of *Shabbat shalom*, the *less* likely we will have modes of being—crankiness, avoidance, magical Wildflower fairy thinking—to atone *for*.

That was, I hope, the gist of the message I shared with the children today, when I spoke with them about the importance of rest. Rest—even when it takes us away from the waking world for an hour or two or ten—rest actually enables us to be *more* present for the work and life and love that awaits us. *Lack* of rest, on the other hand, can contribute to states of being such as were listed in the responsive reading

we shared earlier: callousness, hostility, pettiness, envy, carelessness, fear.

Now, those words are heavy hitters, and I am not meaning to claim that lack of rest will turn you into a vicious and malicious person overnight. But there is a pace and rhythm in our lives we must be careful to honor if we are to continue the good work of this community relatively free of litanies of atonement. For, if we do not honor that pace and rhythm, there will indeed be “so many acts both evident and subtle which” will potentially, as the litany of atonement says, “fuel the illusion of separateness.” Whether those be acts of apathy, acts of martyrdom, acts of blame, acts of anxiety, there are so many acts we can follow through on that can derail our journey and force us to ask, as the song we heard says, “Who can say, I am free, I have purified my heart?”

So I say, in the spirit of Rosh Hashanah, in the spirit of Yom Kippur, in the spirit of *Shabbat shalom*, “now is the time for turning.” Admittedly, as the responsive reading says, “for us, turning does not come so easily. It takes an act of will for us to make a turn. It means breaking with old habits.... It means,” the reading continues, “recognizing that we have the ability to change.”

For some, such change may mean giving up the story of the magical Wildflower fairies and stepping up to help those who are carrying more than their share of the work. For others, it may mean the willingness to relinquish some of the work, and finding the trust that others will do what you have always been used to doing—even if they might do it a little differently. For all of us, it means remembering that the interdependent web of our existence is best sustained by an interdependent effort. If we all contribute our share, no more

but also no less, then the rhythm and pace of our lives will more easily be honored. We each will still have work to do, especially as we strive to find a home of our own. But in our striving, we each can understand as well that when Joshua Bell, or any other musician for that matter, is playing beautiful music for us to hear, no matter where we are, we can stop for a moment and listen.

For just as I mentioned to the children that sleep strengthens our brains and muscles and bones, so I remind you that rest can soften our hearts. With softened hearts, we can thus sing, as the choir sang earlier, “A new heart I will give, not stone, but one that frees...”

So may it be. Amen. Shabbat shalom.

Please rise in body or spirit and join in singing hymn #355, We Lift Our Hearts in Thanks.