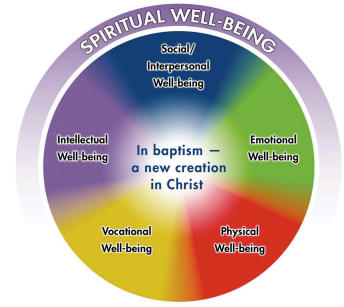


Leap Year

From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God...” Exodus 20: 8-10



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It's a leap year this year. We get a whole extra day. What are you going to do with yours? The question is silly, of course. Leap Year Day is on a Wednesday this year, and many of us will be pursuing our regular lives; work, projects, errands, and things like that. But think of the possibilities ...

There was a short story I read many years ago -- the title is long gone from memory. The premise of the story was that every four years the entire society of this mythical country took all the extra minutes and seconds that had accumulated in the planet's trips around the sun and made it a holiday. Not just a holiday, a grand holiday! Everyone took the day off. They would gather, go to the beach, celebrate life, and generally discard their everyday reality for one day and just enjoy being human. It was a real day off. I remember that the characters were made more serene in their everyday lives just knowing that they got this holiday every four years.

What an idea. One that may seem pretty alien to some in our society, where even leisure is sometimes promoted as a full contact sport. I guess that was the point of that short story, even many years ago. Many of us are stretched, overextended, overscheduled, overbooked, and can't seem to find time for everything. We are either pushed that way by career demands and the economy, our own drive to get things done. There are lots of pressures to do, go, produce. The idea of serenity doesn't quite fit. Even those of us who are making the effort to make sure we have time for family and home sometimes feel like other demands must be put aside or neglected to do so.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a day to set aside like Leap Year Day to put everyday life on the shelf, recharge, and recreate ourselves and our relationships? To reach beyond the everyday and touch something beautiful and transcendent? Here's a thought: WE DO. We were given a clue about all this from ancient texts. Ancient wisdom sure is easy to overlook. As a species we must like to reinvent things, because we always seem to be doing so.

The ancients knew something about living. But except for the Hebrew people, the idea of a vacation would not have occurred to the ancients. Work was ongoing, necessary to survival or dictated by political leadership, and the idea of taking time off was not part of the scheme, unless it was a major festival. Yet the Hebrews wrote about the necessity of a *weekly* Sabbath, to the extent that the commandment was not, "Hey, why don't you consider taking a day off now and then?", it was Commanded By God that you take off one day in seven.

So what did they know? The website, Judaism101 says that Sabbath (or *Shabbat* in Hebrew) involves two interrelated commandments: to remember (zakhor) Shabbat, and to observe (shamor) Shabbat. Remembering refers to the commemoration of our creation, and observing refers to the prohibition against creating anything. It is aimed at letting us enjoy what is already created: us, and the beauty surrounding us in text, art, and music, without the burden of creative effort. And it honors the fact that we were created by the only One who guides creation.

So Sabbath is to give us relief from everyday burdens. Burdens like problem solving. It takes a lot of our creative energy to get through a day of decision-making,

weighing the options, dispute resolving, and other forms of problem solving. What a relief to kick back occasionally and realize that there is a force in the universe who relieves us of the burden of being perfect at it. We have a day to forgive ourselves, admire the gifts we are given by God, and give ourselves a break.

New Year's resolutions for health are good, but it's Leap Year. Here is a unique opportunity to move toward wellness by slowing down occasionally, and it's even an opportunity to build your faith. As the psalmist says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:10) That's the whole point of Sabbath, isn't it? Give yourself a gift this Leap Year, and leap into faith that's it's okay to put down the load once a week this year. – Shalom, Jack Lindsey.

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