

Year of Jubilee

In my fiftieth year I realized I was in the year of Jubilee. I began reading everything I could find on the topic. It seems that it goes this way:

God made the world in six days. On the seventh day He sat back, took a deep breath, looked around, and said, “This is good. This is really good!” So we are invited, in fact commanded, to do the same thing. For six days we roll up our sleeves and do all sorts of creative things that need doing. But on the seventh day (or in some proportion of one to six) we sit back, take a really deep breath, and open our eyes to see how great and good everything is. We see all that *God* has done within us and around us.

There are two parts to this commandment about the Sabbath. The first part is all the “do nots.” Do not cook. Do not clean. Do not light a fire. Do not walk too many steps. Do not go to market. Do not put a burden on your ox, your ass, your servant or slave, or yourself. *Do not do! Stop!* Enjoy a deep breath. Then take some really good rest. Why? Because you need it. Be even more importantly, otherwise you might think that *you* do it all. You may start thinking that you are God.

The second part is “to delight.” Open your eyes and actually look at the beauties that surround you. Savor things slowly. Notice with all your senses what is all around you, and open your heart to delight. Enjoy your spouse and your children. Read the scriptures. Do everything playfully. Sing and dance. Why? Because everything is a gift. It is meant to be enjoyed. What if we walk by it all and do not see or enjoy, and end up never being grateful? But if we are grateful, the gift will return us to the Giver. Then we will overflow with thankfulness for all our blessings. We will adore our Creator.

Well, if this is the Sabbath day, the sabbatical year is a yearlong rest and celebration. Of course, the big question is, “How do we survive?” And the answer is, “Trust. God is God and will provide.”

The Jubilee Year is the seventh times seventh year, the forty-ninth or the fiftieth year. It is the super special rest-and-delight-all-year-long year. But it is even more. It is the time for all of society to be reorganized as if we are returning to the beginning, everything set up in God’s way. Slaves and indentured servants are freed. If land has been amassed by one family but others have none, the land is redistributed so all have their fair share, so all can have their basic life needs met. Land is to lie fallow so nutrients can be restored. And, of course, all workers have free time. It is a year to rest, to enjoy and delight. Why? So we don’t forget that God really, really is in charge. And God wants us to be godly too, and to love and share with others as much as He/She does.

If this is Jubilee, I thought, I pondered what it would look like in my life. I wrote up a page using the images of Jubilee and applied them to the inner journey. I immediately noticed some things about myself. First, I realized I had always been unrelentingly hard on myself, had enslaved myself, so I decided to “Lighten up, Honey.” I did not push myself so much. I purposely planned fun events on my calendar: concerts, plays, movies, evenings with friends.

And I asked for a 30-day retreat. This one was to be a second honeymoon with God. I needed to just rest and enjoy. I did not need any disciplined Zen meditation or Jesuit strictness. I needed time in nature to bask in my Beloved's love. So, I asked my friend, Notre Dame Sister Catherine Griffiths, for space with the Notre Dame Sisters in Ipswich, Massachusetts.

It was a most glorious month! God blessed me so wondrously. I slept as late as I could each morning. If I woke up and felt crotchety, I turned over and put myself back to bed. The sun each day seemed brighter than the day before. I took long walks through the woods or down to the shore. I savored the taste of my food, felt the wind on my skin and blow through my hair, and smelled the earthy forest fragrances. It couldn't have been more delight-full. I shared with Catherine a couple of times a week and took some outings with her. She gave me Macrina Wiederkehr's wonderful booklet that was a tool to help ponder each stage of one's life, spaced over the Lenten season.

The biggest sense that arose within me was overwhelming gratitude for every stage, every aspect of my life. Just overwhelming gratitude. God had poured one blessing after another upon me for the whole of my life. Before, I tended to jerk myself by my shirt front and say, "Be grateful." But I was rushing around being responsible for galoshes all over the place. Now, I had space and time to become aware, to allow myself to be opened in gratitude.

The negative I got in touch with was resentment, deep anger that I held onto and continued to feed. I realized I walked around with lots of resentments about one thing or another. The biggest were directed toward some of my past Prioresses. I could now see that this was really ridiculous. Here I was holding on to this ancient anger burning a hole in me, fuming away. But it was all in the past. So, I decided to try to dismantle this stuff. I knew that would not be easy, that it would be a process.

Sometime in midway in my Jubilee retreat, Catherine told me about some local chiropractors who did all kinds of holistic healing. I had felt a lump in my breast months earlier and had been to the doctor who told me to wait for my regular mammogram, guessing that it was a cyst. But I thought maybe these women could do something, so I went. They started by saying, "Our theory is that whatever is going on in your body is 90% spiritual, 9% mental, and 1% physical. Our theory is that a cyst is walled off waste matter. What waste are you holding onto? Our theory is that the right side of the body is the father or masculine, and the left side is the mother or feminine. So what is your problem with your mother?"

I thought, "Wow! How did they know? Yes, this resentment has been waste matter that I have clung to for years, too many years! Mothers, not Mother." The experience was an affirmation through my body of what I was uncovering in my spiritual searching. So I ended the retreat saying, "Hi, I'm Mary. I am a resenter. I am beginning a recovery program."

REFLECTION

Ponder your own individual need for Jubilee. Look at parts of yourself that can be affected by the year of Jubilee:

1. I am the farmer. I give rest to the land of my inner self—no planting, pruning, or harvesting. In what ways can I rest deeply?
Can I rest from criticizing myself for any deficiencies, imperfections, or past sins?
Do I trust enough that God really cares for me and is the One who is in charge of growing me? Who is in charge here anyway?
I stop to see what God has done in my life—and list the delights. I savor what is good. I remember all God's actions to save me in the past and in the present.
2. I am the earth. I have given fruit and yield of all kinds.
Now I rest and just soak in the spring rain and let the miracles of growth spring from within me. I am gentle with myself.
What innate gifts/talents do I discover about myself?
What gives me energy?
3. I am the slave.
What do I need to be freed from? Drives and compulsions?
What binds me? Perhaps fear or resentments or life's disappointments?
What have I served long enough (six years...forty-nine years) and now need to be released from?
How do I feel when I am freed?
4. I am the buyer of the land. Now I will return the land to the original owners so they and their children may have their needs met.
Is there anything in my life that is out of proportion that needs adjusting according to God's ways?
5. I am the banker. On Jubilee I will cancel all debts with no payments given back to me.
With whom do I need to reconcile?
What grudges/resentments need to be cancelled with no satisfaction paid back to me?
Can I forgive as Jesus does?
Can I give freely with no strings attached?
6. I am the debtor. How do I feel with my debt pardoned?
Can I let go of any ill feelings I have held onto? How will I give thanks?
7. I am the Jubilee celebrator. What gives me life that I can choose more dramatically?
For what am I grateful? What do I celebrate?
What do I want to sing about? To dance about?