Opinion
Spirituality



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"*Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time.*"

—Abraham Heschel

On Holy Thursday I made banana bread with my kids. I made my wife's favorite, carrot cake, on Holy Saturday. While the homemade dough or batter rose heated in the oven, each used baking soda to provide a chemical leavening agent; no fungal yeast on hand in our cupboard. No need then for proofing the dough. No need for time to let it rest and ferment.



The author and his kids made banana bread.

Sometime in Lent I cleared out a space in the alcove-turned-home-office and brought up the old keyboard from the basement. Up came the many music books I purchased from my eight years of playing saxophone. To share the space, I also bought a headphone jack so the kids can unrhythmically bang away on the musical keyboard while in silence a few feet over I can still bang away unrhythmically on the laptop keyboard.

I'm neither a musician nor a baker. But I still make the space, and the time, to dabble in dough and in descants. (The carrot cake and the banana bread were delicious. What I lack in humility I make up for in brown sugar and wheat flour.) The poetry of Joe Grant in JustFaith Ministries' *Still in the Storm* ruminates beautifully on pauses, rests, and restoration, utilizing images and analogies of music making and bread baking. Lately I've been riffing on his poetry.

Music modulates, dough is leavened. In any song, time must be kept and in baking, time is the unseen ingredient essential for birthing the kneaded dough or mixed batter. Grant reminded me that music is given its form, the way most modes of communication are given definition, through rests, pauses and well-placed silence. Presently, the tempo of my life, the heat of the oven, has increased. I fear I may have missed the proofing, the resting. Time, it seems, has been bifurcated. Some components of my life have paused, other components have expanded and increased with alacrity.

Said another way, it's as if the ultimate guest, Christ, has entered my house without warning. Part of me feels pulled to do so much more, like Martha, while other parts of me feel an invitation, like Mary, to pause, to be, to listen. Mary, I tell myself, was listening attentively, she was not "doing nothing." She was actively pausing.



The author's carrot cake, his wife's favorite

I have never suffered from a subpar music instructor. They have all been somewhere between great and phenomenal teachers and one of them, in a high school symphonic band, used to admonish us, "Don't rest on the rests!" This was not a strange or even masochistic demand; this was not a call to be like Martha and constantly keep busy in our space. The void, the stoppage, the nothingness comes between songs. The rest is an essential part of the music.

From the time the guest enters until she leaves, from the first bar to the last beat, time is present throughout the song. You do not stop making music, or being a part of the band when you have a four, eight, or sixteen-bar rest. Instead of filling the space with the timber of your voice or your instrumental music, you go silent and you listen and count each beat of the rest so that when your next note comes you don't miss it or enter late to the detriment of the whole.

Nothing was quite as frustrating to me as hearing the friend next to me come back in while I was lost in the time I did not count. I am called to rest, to count time,

throughout a song in the same manner a caterpillar is called to his chrysalis. Likewise, when the kept time, under the guise of a rest, concludes, my melody will resound in space the way the caterpillar-cum-butterfly fills the air with his new wings.

Christ was given a tomb and Holy Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath Day. What an interesting comingling of time and space, of keeping holy the Sabbath. His body, at rest in a sealed tomb subject to time as kept on earth, while his Spirit descended to hell in that amplitude of time we call eternity. A fascinating dance of scarcity and abundance of time and eternity.

I believe individuals can change like bread baking or music modulating. We can change utterly and completely if we attune ourselves to the pulses of space and time. The Book of Galatians reminds us that a little yeast leavens the whole dough (Galatians 5:9). At times I feel like dough, being stretched upon a cold countertop. At other times I feel like the eggs, separated and then beaten vigorously. But at all times, I am to recall that beyond what I feel, I must be a leaven, an agent of change. The leaven is the part of a recipe that honors the external forces beyond our control — time and space. And with the leaven, all can rise into something new, usable and enjoyable. This seems to say, the world cannot change until I change first.

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It is therefore good to pause of our own volition. Better still, to be grateful, to acquiesce to the pauses offered to us. Pauses are not voids, are not empty. Pauses contain and are contained by time. Pauses are so we might be: Be attentive, be attuned to holiness, be like Mary who was offered rest, accepted it and paused to make the time to listen. It is necessary for fields to lay fallow, for the dirt to rest and restore. Fallow fields do not reap or sow, but neither do they refuse the rains or the sun. Nor do they extricate themselves from the rhythm kept by the seasons. Their rest is a part of an ongoing song for which new life will grow after their active resting.

How timely and timeless then is the Sabbath? For the Sabbath Day or any sabbatical period, pauses are not voids, are not empty. As Sonny and Cher sang, "the beat goes on." Keep holy the Sabbath by keeping time within your rest — for your family, your mental and physical health. That way you can enflesh the paradox of being restored while you heed the call of that high school music teacher and understand what it means to not rest on the rests.

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