Liturgical Lessons from the Decalogue: Sabbath

By Nicholas Zork

"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. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11)

The fourth commandment is pregnant with liturgical implications, but I want to focus on one that is often missed by those of us who are most committed to observing the seventh-day Sabbath. We miss this key implication by failing to adequately learn from Jesus' Sabbath practices. Although Jesus did customarily go to the synagogue on Sabbath (Luke 4:16), the Gospels suggest that the bulk of Jesus' Sabbath activities took place outside these liturgical gatherings. For Jesus, the Sabbath was primarily a day of active holiness, embodied in His healing ministry. The Gospel of John emphasizes the way Jesus' healing practices flaunted Sabbath prohibitions and challenged prevailing notions of true Sabbath observance. Describing the healing by the pool of Bethesda, the Evangelist recounts the following: "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.'" (John 5:16-17) Jesus' response infuriated His critics and should be unsettling to us as well, especially in light of the command to rest on the Sabbath. But we must grapple with this story if our Sabbath worship practices are to resonate with the One in whose name we gather.

In his book, The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day, Sigve Tonstad offers an important reflection on this Gospel story:

"Like Jesus, His critics invoke the memory of creation as the basis for Sabbath holiness, but their idea of the Sabbath derives from a..."
distorted picture of reality. The distortion hails back to a distant time when all was well in the world. In the serenity and perfection of God's rest at Creation, as their picture still has it, something is missing: Where is God in the face of present need and suffering? Being present, and responding to the present reality, constitutes the essence of Jesus' idea of the Sabbath. At Creation God's commitment to humanity is described by God's rest, but the reality of disease and death calls for a different Sabbath message. Resting in the face of crying needs implies remoteness and indifference. God is not like that, for God is not remote; God is present. This message, written on the Sabbath from the beginning, is still the message of the Sabbath, and Jesus delights to point it out. No matter how shocking the thought, Jesus defends His actions by the ultimate criterion: 'My Father is working until now, and I am also working.' Prioritizing the notion of presence, working takes precedence over resting. God is, as were, hard at work to make right what is wrong."

And this is precisely what we find Jesus doing on the Sabbath: Jesus is present with those in need, working "make right was is wrong."

So how, then, are we called to observe this day in light of God's healing presence with us? Like Jesus, we too are called to be present, meeting the needs of those around us, bringing healing to broken people, addressing the suffering of a world that is not what it was created to be. And if we are honest, we must admit that most of us do not observe the Sabbath the way Jesus did. Observing the Sabbath according to the example of Jesus means that we are called to be actively present, present with God in meeting the needs of our neighborhoods, cities and world. Resting from our work is a rest from self-concern, not a rest from all concern. But my fear is that we have turned Sabbath into yet another opportunity not to be present but to be absent from a world in need as we withdraw for worship gatherings. Unfortunately, these gatherings are often characterized not by presence but by what and who is absent: "worldly" people and their "worldly" practices; needy people and their needs; and, most of all, anything that might threaten the rules of the irrelevant games we've become so comfortably adept at playing.

I believe God invites us to gather on Sabbath to worship our Creator and Redeemer, but God invites us to gather not as an act of withdrawal from the world but as an act of being present in the world and in places of need. We are called to say with Jesus, "our Father is working until now, and we are also working" - not at our daily jobs, not paying bills, not doing laundry - but for deeper purposes.

Recently in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I met some followers of Jesus who know how to gather with purpose and presence. As a congregation they are deeply involved in addressing the needs of their neighbors, whether these neighbors are members of their congregation or not. I asked the pastor of this small congregation about their liturgy, and he told me a story: Many people in Buenos Aires do not have homes so they occupy empty buildings. At one point, local police were planning to evict the numerous families from an abandoned clinic where they were living, putting them out on the street. But just before the police arrived, members of the congregation gathered the families in the center courtyard of the clinic. They led the people in prayer and song at gunpoint for eighteen hours until the police finally gave up. "Worship for us," the pastor said, is "a tool of resistance." What a
profound example of a liturgical practice that is present in world!

We serve a God who is present with us and invites us to set aside a day to experience that presence. We experience God's presence as God meets us in worship and as we encounter and embody Jesus' presence in a world so badly in need of liberation and healing. As we prepare for worship on coming Sabbaths and liturgically remember God's presence with us - in Creation and Redemption - let us ask how we can be more present to both God and the world we are called to serve.

Share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue.

Worship Leading

10 Things Every Worship Leader Should Know

By Cheryl Wilson-Bridges

For every worship leaders, there are essentials that we should store in our ministry tool chests. Many of us update our skills on the latest music and technology, while we lack a knowledge of the basic worship essentials. Here are 10 things that we too often ignore or overlook in our worship planning.

10 Things Every Worship Leader Should Know:

#1: God

Know God's will, purpose and plan for your life. Talk to Jesus each day and let Him direct your songs and worship plans. Eph. 5:17-19

#2: Your Bible

Spend time reading the Bible so that the Bible can read and transform you. Ps. 119:105

#3: Yourself

Know your temperament, leadership style and calling. Know what situations can build you up or break you down and learn how to navigate both.

#4: Your Pastor

Foster a regular working relationship with your pastor. Respect and understand his vision and mission for the church and know how to interpret it through praise. 1 Tim. 5:17

#5: Your Congregation

Know the spiritual condition of your congregation. Strive to teach, guide and pastor through music.

#6: Your Craft
Continue to improve your musical skills. Good leaders are constant learners. 1 Chron. 25:7-8

#7: Your Limitations

Know the areas where you need help and ask for it.

#8: Your Resources

Know what resources are available to you to be successful. Build, manage and maintain leadership teams. Mk. 3:13-14

#9: Your Successor

Ask God to show you your replacement and prepare him or her for your role. Deut. 34:9

#10: Your Prayer Closet

Know that being called to be a worship leader requires Godly wisdom, strength, humility and Holy Spirit power. Surrender to God in prayer and find a secluded place offer your private praise. Mt. 14:23

Share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue.

Featured Media

‘Or the Resident Alien in Your Towns’: Sabbath and Justice in the Commandments

Click here to watch Sigve Tonstad’s presentation at the 2013 Andrews University Music and Worship Conference.[1] Considering the implications of Sabbath theology, Tonstad offers key insights on the important issue of how Christian worship relates to the biblical vision of justice. After watching the video, please share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue.

"'Or the Resident Alien in Your Towns': Sabbath and Justice in the Commandments" - Sigve Tonstad

[1] Views expressed by all presenters are not necessarily those of the North American Division, Andrews University or event sponsors.
Empowered Volunteers

By Jonathon Cobb

Over the past 3 years, I have been the Technical Director of our local church. With that, one of the main areas of responsibility is volunteer recruitment and retention. As with anything that we are a part of, we want to enjoy the working atmosphere. Spending time with your team is the best possible way to achieve this. It allows you to build quality relationships with each individual team member, which we all want.

Here are five simple ways to strengthen your technical team:

1. Take them out to lunch individually. Food gathers everyone together.

   Take time to have fun and get to know the people you serve with. It will help you realize that they have lives too and will help you to better gauge how much you can ask from them.

2. Have the entire worship team together on a Friday Night. This is not work related. Fill the atmosphere with food and games, like a family gathering.

   Again, it is very important to make a life with your volunteers. They're not just a knob that you can turn up and down whenever you want to, but real people working together for God.

3. Let your team enjoy creativity outside of your church. Take them to a different gathering that may not even be in your denomination.

   Doing so allows them to not feel any responsibility for the service while seeing what others are doing and it is refreshing. Being a student of what others are doing is important.

4. Provide challenging growth opportunities.

   Have a concert or night of worship. Your team should love to do special events that stretch them.

5. Believe in your team.

   Trust them and give them room, coach where necessary, but allow them to develop themselves and learn how to celebrate their mistakes. This will create a safe environment for growth.

Discuss this article in our Facebook dialogue.
Por André Reis

En la última Newsletter, promocionamos *En Espíritu y en Verdad*, un libro sobre música y adoración publicado por Pacific Press in 2013. Uno de los capítulos del libro que tuve el privilegio de escribir es "La Música y La Adoración" (El primero fue "Elena de White y la Música"). En este capítulo, establezco cinco principios encontrados en las Escrituras sobre el culto cristiano:

1. El culto cristiano es Cristocéntrico
2. El culto cristiano es racional
3. El culto cristiano es edificante
4. El culto cristiano es exultante
5. El culto cristiano es transformador

En el capítulo, propongo ideas para escoger y planificar la música en el culto Adventista que sostenga cada uno de los principios del culto cristiano. En resumen:

1. La música Cristocéntrica. La música en el culto tiene como punto de partida la proclamación del mensaje de Jesucristo. Hay un gran poder en el canto congregacional que exalta a Cristo.

2. La música racional. La música sacra debe ayudar al creyente a ejercer sus facultades cognitivas en la adoración. La alabanza requiere una acción consciente y voluntaria por parte de los adoradores, quienes deben involucrarse personalmente en la adoración.

3. La música edificante facilita el culto edificante cuando habla directamente a la mente y al corazón, fortaleciendo al creyente en su vida cristiana y profundizando su compromiso con Dios.

4. La música exultante. La música que promueve el culto exultante necesita tener poder y ser impactante, llevando a toda la congregación a cantar con entusiasmo y fervor, como la música de los salmos. La cuestión no es tanto el estilo de la música, sino si la congregación está totalmente integrada y comprometida en la alabanza.

5. La música transformadora debe no solo consolar y fortalecer al adorador, sino también confrontarlo y desafiarlo para que alcance un mayor nivel de experiencia con Dios. El acto de adorar no admite cambios parciales; requiere una metamorfosis. Las armonías de voces e instrumentos, las melodías, el ritmo y las letras deben conducir al adorador a aceptar de manera resuelta y decidida el llamado del evangelio y optar plenamente por los requisitos de Dios para su vida.

En conclusión:

"Tal vez el punto más importante de este capítulo es el hecho de que ninguno de los principios bíblicos de la música en el culto sagrado excluye la música tradicional o la música contemporánea. Como se ve aquí, la música sacra por excelencia es la que une a toda la congregación en cantos de alabanza. Por lo tanto, se puede alcanzar el culto integral con muchos estilos diferentes de música, con diferentes instrumentos y enfoques, siempre que la congregación sea movida a participar y los..."
adoradores sean edificados, inspirados y transformados. Cualquier estilo musical, ya sea tradicional o contemporáneo, que interrumpa este proceso debe ser considerado inapropiado o ineficaz para el culto adventista.” (En Espíritu y en Verdad, p. 98).