

Don't Let Me Lose My Soul
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Mayflower Church
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A Rip Van Winkle kind of tale for you today, by yours truly.

It's getting quite safe out, the numbers of death and serious illness are low, especially if you are vaccinated and boosted which you are, so you venture out of your home and into the life of the city. You've not been out for... how long has it been? A long time. Due to a deadly pandemic. You've been out for walks and to get essentials. But not really out and about freely into the world. The way you used to be. You've been working from home, helping your kids schooling from home, experiencing movies, plays, concerts, lectures from home, doing meetings and socializing from home. Thanks to modern technology.

But now you are venturing out and thinking thoughts like these: How do we do this living again? How do we manage time? How do we experience the hours of life? How do we discern what's important and good in this life that has been so radically upended by this strange mind and life altering pandemic?

What's more you are expected to live both realities now... to somehow blend them... do both the before and the during... double up. Go back to the office AND work from home. A more ordered life of breakfast, commute, work 9 to 5 commute, home AND constant availability, 24-7. Bring your kids back to the life from before AND respond to their deep needs and changes that happened during. What do you let go of? What do you return to? What new ways do you incorporate?

So, you leave your home that day eyes wide open... Now how do I live again? What's important? How do I live my days? You've been getting news 24 7. You've been listening to podcasts and reading books. Lots of thoughts have been stirring during the pandemic hibernation... Lots of advice coming from all directions.

You wander into a space with lots of flashing neon lights and giant screens...(kind of like Times Square) You are fascinated. It's all around you as you are shopping for life. Bright lights. Everything new, alluring, updated. Newest fashion, newest design, newest tech and advertising that bores down subtly but effectively into your soul. "Your soul needs this...." Some of it *is* good. Things you've needed and put off buying during the long hibernation... like a good pillow. And some things that give such delight. Like that glorious yolk yellow tea pot that lights up your

little kitchen and replaces the grungy old gray pot. There are ads everywhere for this and that. There's an ad for a pre-school that will surely put your child on the path to getting into a fabulous college. You think: "after all this, what we've been through, people are still obsessing about that?!" Shopping around for how to live now... how to spend your life....you are...

A car goes by with windows down. You hear U2, the song... and I still haven't found what I'm looking for." You hum it now while you keep wandering around the city.... searching...

And then you happen upon a gate into a kind of strangely shaped garden/park in the middle of the city. At the entrance it says:

"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here". (There is no subtext at all, like: you must believe these things in order to enter, in order to belong. You can tell: It means what it says.)

And then another sign, upon entering, with a box, "Please put all your electronic devices here, in order to be fully present. They will be safe."

You are now *in* this dense, beautiful urban grounds space with a path threaded loosely around surrounded by native and watershed friendly plants, bejeweled with art and sculpture, and designed with stations, places to pause, like on the grounds of a monastery. There on one side is a prayer or meditation bench for solitary communion with God. And here, a prayer wall where people tuck in their prayers for healing and wholeness. On a corner, facing out to the city, a bold piece of art with the words: "Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public." (Cornell West) You continue on the path and there is a station representing forgiveness, and another one for non-violence and peace, and one for gratitude, and one for generosity and the modern tithe, and one for compassion for the self and others, and one for sabbath rest...

Even though the stations speak of big things, lofty things, challenging things, you don't feel pressure, or judgement, somehow quite the opposite... you feel grace, and a sense of longing...

You decide to sit down at the Sabbath rest station. It's at the farthest spot from the entrance. You see the words sculpted into rock here—"remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy". And there are little message rocks scattered around with the message... "Be still... and know that I am God."

You close your eyes and a prayer rises up from your life to your lips.... "Life now...It's all too much... Please God, don't let me lose me soul."

You rest there.

You doze a little.

Then your mind wanders around gently.

You hear a voice in your mind's ear: "Don't just sit there. Do something." Then another voice, softer, "Don't do something. Just sit there." You decide to follow the second voice.

You think of your friends who are Muslim and how they are fasting now during Ramadan. They are busy with life too but still they give themselves over to their religion and it shapes how they live. And your Jewish friends .. so many are going back to their religion, not believing literally in the bible but they do the practices, as best they are able, sabbath and seder and more, and it somehow it doesn't seem to add burden to life. Rather, it guides them unto the path of real life.

You think of your great grandparents, maybe you have their name, they were Conservative Christians who were strict about sabbath. Later generations used to kind of make fun of this. ... How they would never shop on Sunday... And they wouldn't even mow the lawn.... They put their to do list away so there were no "have-tos" on that day... They just rested and had fun. Now, sitting there, at the sabbath station, you wonder if they were kind of on to something... Not the rigidity and the judgement and the perfection. Not that, but making the space and time for real rest. Being intentional about it. Disciplined even. Just knowing you were going to do this because it's just something you do. Not a new-year's-resolution-kind-of-thing, but an I-trust-this-practice-of-my-religion-is-important kind of thing.

You think of your friend, how every Saturday afternoon and evening she puts away her computer and cell phone. She doesn't hear beeps or buzzes, doesn't check messages. Her family and close friends know how to reach her if they need her. Nobody else needs to reach her. And Her body has coming to count on this kind of freedom.

You remember what a minister from long ago would say and he actually practiced what he preached: Divert daily. Withdraw weekly. Abandon annually. You remember too how he said that he used to think preaching was all about finding new and innovative interpretations of scripture and now he thinks it's about reminding himself and the congregation of the essential stories and practices of the faith, because it's no longer the air we breathe and there is so much that diverts us.

Then, sitting there on that sabbath bench in that contemplative space in the middle of the active city, you start thinking your own thoughts... not fed to you by your unconscious... or by your smart phone... or by the city lights... I am on this ancient path today that my ancestors followed. They stayed true even with all the new things around them, the industrial revolution, age of enlightenment, and the horrors of war and pandemics. Maybe I should get more religious, not for perfection or for some judgement day or some after life... But maybe I should practice these things like sabbath rest. I do like the word "practice", it's not about perfection,

but it's more like practicing an instrument or a sport. Maybe I should get back on this path of my ancestors and keep the sabbath, not literally exactly 24 hours but literally enough time each week to really rest my soul.

It's about time to leave. You notice a little library with booklets in it. You take one and then hesitate, resisting toomuchness, about to put it back. But then you think, no I'll just intentionally and with discipline read it slowly a day at a time... And so, you take this gift with you.

You feel like your soul has finally caught up with you. You stand up and walk out of this amazing little place. You notice on the way out that it's called "the Jesus path". You smile and you know you'll be back. Because there's wisdom there.

Instead of walking back through the busy square-commons-piazza-plaza—whatever you want to call it, all vying for your attention—your hours, your life energy, your money, your heart... instead, you walk to the river and get down to the path closest to the river. The snow and ice have melted, so this wonderful path is now apparent... away from the cars and the bikes and the fast walkers with buds in the ears, all that is good too, lively life!, but just not now, for you... you want to be by the river and let the trees hug you and let your soul be rested a little while longer.

Oh life! What goodness! The Jesus path, the river path, and one more path to something to close this special day. You remember how the day began... you left the house and went back into the world today, wondering: *now* how do I live?...The sun is setting and you now go to the huge arena, put on a really good N95, you see the noted epidemiologist, a 70 year old boomer with underlying health conditions, Osterholm going in with his mask on too, and you lose yourself in the crowd and in the music and in the spirit as Bruce Springsteen and his band take you away into another wonderful reality for your soul!! You are lifted higher and higher as Bruce sings of yearning for salvation in this life... "land of hope and dreams".

Thanks for joining me in this little flight of imagination about a Jesus path.

We've survived and now we need to choose how to live again! Amen