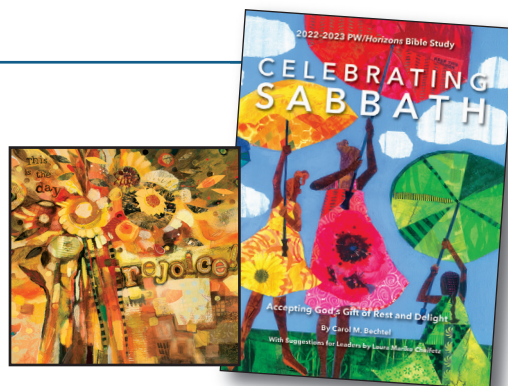


Our Common Ground

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson One of the 2022–2023 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel



Scripture: Matthew 11:28–12:13

Generations of Christians have found strength and joy in their relationship with God and in learning about how God was active in the lives of our ancestors. Before we had a written Bible, we had stories about God passed through the oral tradition. Similarly, sharing history and beliefs by word of mouth has always been of particular importance to the Indigenous people of North America and the connection we feel with the Great Spirit.

This oral tradition has been attacked by the Doctrine of Discovery, a document utilized as a tool to stake claim over the lands of the Indigenous peoples. It is important to recognize that the very land on which we each live at one time belonged to an Indigenous community. Some people believe that Indigenous people are long gone, but that could not be further from the truth.

It is not my intention or the intention of Indigenous communities to make everyone feel guilty about the history of the founding of the United States of America. We cannot change those actions. We can, however, do our best to try to understand the teachings that sustained the Indigenous peoples, and consider how that relationship with God the Creator brings us closer to the one who made us.

As we embark on understanding more about the Sabbath, let us be mindful of those teachings, because there can be found a deep connection to the place we call home. Learning about and respecting one another's perspectives and backgrounds can help us all become a better community, even if it means going through uncomfortable discussions to help guide us to a better way that suits everyone. Let's take a moment to focus on unity in our lives.

What are some common ground beliefs and perspectives that we all share as followers of God?

Re-read Matthew 11:28–12:13, which gives us Jesus inviting “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” followed by two stories that feature burdens being lifted on the Sabbath, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees.

What are some of the value systems that the Pharisees hold close to their hearts?

What are some of the value systems that the disciples hold close to their hearts?

What are the areas of common ground that all the characters in the passage share?

What similarities do you find between the common ground shared by the characters in the Matthew passage and the common ground we share as followers of God today?

As believers in the Word of God, it is very easy to focus on the “How” of keeping the Sabbath rather than the “Why.” If we are going to follow God’s command, we

want to do it the “right” way, and that tends to shift our attention away from Sabbath being a time to connect with God and with God’s people and creation.

Criticizing others has been going on since long before the time of Jesus. We still see it today, and see how quickly and easily it spreads on the web and on social media. We see the toll it can take on people, especially young children who are tormented by bullies. Most of the time, conflicts arise when one or both sides of an issue want to feel validated in their beliefs and value systems. Sometimes, the worst bullies we face are the ones inside ourselves.

How would you describe “validation”?

When was a time you felt validated by someone during a time of criticism?

What does it feel like when someone tells you, “I see you” or “I get you”?

What words, body language or responses do you give to validate others? Which do you feel most validated by?

What are some talents you possess that can make others feel validated?

Imagine you are the sheep in the pit or the man in need of healing from Matthew 12. When so many others pass by in their righteous observation of Sabbath, Jesus stops. Jesus recognizes you. Jesus eases your burden.

What do the words “completely restored” mean to you?

What sort of restoration do you feel you need in your life right now?

In what ways do you feel connected with God?

Prayer: Creator God, we thank you for your teachings. We thank you for helping us to see the value of your love expressed in our lives. Thank you for teaching us that, no matter what side of the story we are on, we belong to you. Help us in our times of trouble to reach out to you with our burdens. Help us to understand that we need you to lift us up in those times we feel trapped and alone. Help us to be a light to those who are where we have once been, and help us to validate their lives, deserving of your grace and mercy.

We know you give us opportunities to strengthen our bond with you. Help us to recognize the gift of connecting with you and the beauty that you surround us with every day. Most of all, help us to teach others about the importance of staying connected with you. Help us to silence those voices that burden us and wear us down, and to lift up the voices that praise your creation and your holy name.

With praise and adoration, we thank you for your grace, for seeing us when we ourselves cannot see who we are in times of need. Help us to see you, in your full attire of grace and mercy. In your guidance, help us to find unity with all people and places and plants and animals as we live together in your wondrous world. In your amazing grace we pray. Amen.

Danelle Crawford McKinney is the first Dakota woman (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate) ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a teaching elder from Dakota Presbytery. She also works with Indigenous young adults at Haskell Indian Nations University.

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson Two of the 2022–2023 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel

Scripture: Genesis 1:1–2:3

Plants, animals, nature. When do we ever stop to enjoy it?

A year ago, at the university where I work, I received the amazing privilege of learning how to put up a tipi. It certainly was a learning experience! I imagined being led through the process by someone who had a gentle, guiding voice like an elementary school teacher. What I got instead was an instructor who told us that we would have to follow his instructions . . . and that we should be prepared to be yelled at. Before he began his career working at the university, the instructor served in the army. He was a typical Indigenous community leader. His tone was not too mean, but also not too nice.

Surprisingly to all of us who helped build the tipi, we responded better to his harsh words than we would have if he had been the kind, gentle guider. His expectations were high and we loved that we could build it the way that he needed us to. He pushed us to be our very best, and we felt proud that we were able to rise to the challenge of building a structure that met his idea of a good, sound tipi.

This year, we put up a tipi again. We didn't need to be yelled at as much, *and* we were still able to build it according to his expectations. A couple of days after the tipi was built, a thunderstorm with very strong winds hit campus. Amazingly, the tipi stayed up during that tempest.

Today, most buildings require steel, concrete, lumber—all fabricated or mixed according to standards and codes. Everything that we used to build the tipi came right from the resources that our planet provides. Being out there putting the structure up, I was struck by the reality that I was building using materials that came directly from Mother Earth. Once it was up, I was amazed at how big it actually was. A ladder could not

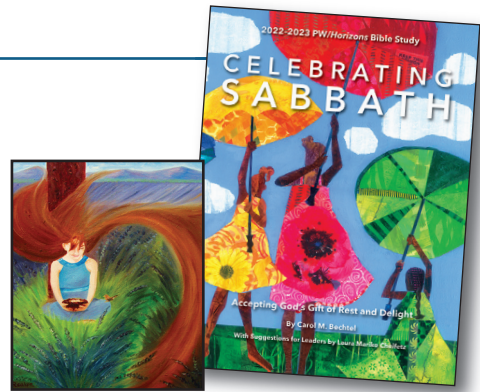
reach the top, and yet we were able to construct the tipi as a majestic dwelling without using one.

What are those images that come to mind when thinking about the resources of plants, animals, nature?

Revisit a time when you felt truly moved by the majesty of God's creation. Express that time and how you felt using words, images, dance, music or other creative means.

Think about a time when you were able to accomplish a feat you didn't think you could do. Share your experience of feeling proud of your accomplishment using words, images, dance, music or other creative means.

The main idea in Lesson Two of *Celebrating Sabbath* is that all of creation is a gift from God. God provides and we have everything we need right where we are. To be able to stop, cease from our labors, and take time to witness the majesty of God's grace is intentional. How can we remember and be thankful for those resources and gifts that are given to us freely?



When was a time you received a memorable gift from a friend or group of friends?

Think about your best friend. What draws you to that person?

In what ways does this relationship help you in your life?


In what ways does your relationship with God compare to your friend(s)?

Prayer: Great Spirit God, we thank you for the resources you give us. We thank you for the love and care you put into creation. Help us to recognize the relationship you long to have with us and the relationship you long for us to have with one another—even when we feel unworthy.

We know you want what's best for us. Help us to live into your will for us, rather than our own desires. Help us to share our resources with others—not because we want to help the needy, but to honor you and all the people you created in your majesty. Help us to look closer at the spirits of those who long for you and don't even know that you are the master of building towers of strength within us.

With our own inner song, we lift up your holy name to those who need to hear your voice and know your love for all of us. Help us to keep building relationships so that others can experience the value of your creation, of the relationship that carries us through the toughest times we face. Give us hope when we feel there is nothing left to look forward to. In your wondrous regalia of grass and leaves and the creatures of your dance, we pray to you our almighty teacher. Amen.

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