

Santa Cruz Fellowship
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Friends,

Thanksgiving 2020

As we enter this season of Thanksgiving we once again have an opportunity to look back over this last year; to look for the things that we can be thankful for and to dust for the 'fingerprints of God' in our lives and in our community. This has been a year filled with the unexpected.

Covid-19 has dominated much of our lives and the lives of those we love and deeply miss. It has been a year of giving up things we had looked forward to, a year of change at almost every level. Looking at Covid season as a type of Sabbath has helped take some of the sting out of sheltering-in-place for both of us. It has also led us to explore if there are deeper connections between the meaning of Sabbath living and the current COVID-19 situation.

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word to "cease" or "to stop". The command given in Exodus 20:7-10 was for a full day every week to be given to rest, to cease working. Lev 25:1-6 took it even further and commanded that every 7th year the land was to be given a sabbath rest. "Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest." In agricultural terms this season is called a *fallow season*. A season where the land rests and the soil is able to be replenished with the nutrients that earlier crops have depleted. Farmers for centuries have been letting their land go fallow for a season in order to restore some of the fertility that has been lost. If you were to drive by a fallow field it might not look like much but, dirt; unproductive, useless, non-essential. But farmers have known for centuries is that there is something happening when the land is allowed to rest. Not only do fallow seasons help to restore fertility to the soil, they also interrupt pest and disease cycles and help to control weeds.

Some of the questions we have been asking in this season of thankful reflection are: What has been happening under the surface of our lives? Where have we been experiencing Sabbath (or being Fallowed) and where have we resisted? Where has God been replenishing us? What 'pests and weeds' are showing up?

We are fully aware that not everyone is experiencing this *fallow season* the same. Some are working harder than ever in the midst of shelter-in-place with children needing to be schooled from home and work days going online. The two of us have been able to continue to connect with groups and individuals and for that we are grateful. What has changed for us has been 2 things; pace and focus.

For us, the pace of life has slowed down. Online meetings and classes require no travel to and from. Some of our groups and programs were cancelled, opening up time in our schedules; time for reading, time for rest, time for spiritual renewal. The other thing that has changed is that our focus of relationship has been narrowed. This has had benefits as well as the natural drawbacks. The benefit has been the opportunity to invest ourselves more deeply in those with whom we are sheltering, relationships that we often take for granted, and to meet more often and to go deeper with some of our online communities.

As we have both taken the time to look back on this Fallow Year we have been able to identify some specific fruits of this time and we have been grateful for many aspects of the change in our pace and focus. As we move forward into this new season of Advent, we find like all of you, that we are being encouraged to both wait and watch. This too, seems an appropriate analogy for the end of 2020.

Grateful for all of you, for our community of fellow travelers and for the gift of your friendship!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich and Jayne". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom of the page.