

“Rest and Restoration”
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Last week, I left you with closing words from Wendell Berry:

Within the circles of our lives
we dance the circles of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
the cycles of the moon
within the circles of the seasons...

In celebration of Earth Day, we were talking about spring and new life, and transformation...circles and cycles of constant change...

Well, all of this constant change can be exciting...and it can also be exhausting!

This week from our reading we have the image of yet another circle – the merry-go-round – a metaphor, as Donna Schaper said, for “work we can’t escape,” or for a life that feels way too busy, way too full, way too tiring.

How many of you sometimes feel like you’re riding on a merry-go-round and wishing it would slow down for a bit so you could hop off?

I was thinking this week about her merry-go-round image. “Children love carousels,” she says. Adults, perhaps not so much. She’s being metaphorical, but you know, it actually *is* physically more difficult in a way for an adult to ride a carousel than it is for a child. This has to do with centrifugal force.

I don’t know how much you remember about centrifugal force from your science classes. Centrifugal force is what makes it feel like you are being pulled outward when you are going around in a circle or when you’re in a car that’s going around a curve. It is what pulls us off center. In fact the word “centrifugal” is from the Latin meaning “center fleeing.”

Feeling uncentered in your life? You may be the victim of centrifugal force.

Centrifugal force is greater the further one is from center. It is also greater the more one weighs. And generally speaking, adults are heavier than children.

This tends to be true both literally and metaphorically. As adults, we have more “stuff,” more “baggage” that we carry with us. There is more dirt in our jars, so to speak. We often tend not to be as carefree as we once were. We bear some pretty heavy burdens. We are always thinking about – and often worrying about – the future...about the markets...about our work and what is

being asked of us...about our relationships...about our retirement...about our health...about each other. And because of all that “stuff,” we are more often weighed down and pulled off center during our ride on the merry-go-round. Which could help explain why our rides aren’t as merry as they used to be.

Technically speaking, of course, as some of you scientists out there are no doubt thinking to yourselves, centrifugal force is a fiction. There is no such thing. There *is* no force that pulls us outward. It’s made up. It’s not true. It’s an illusion. What is actually happening, as the carousel is turning, is that we are simply continuing to go straight ahead.

Which, in itself, is also a good metaphor for our lives...how often do we find ourselves stubbornly trying to keep going straight on our intended path, resisting the natural circles and cycles of life that interfere with our best-laid plans? Perhaps there is no external force that pulls us off center, but we pull ourselves off center, in a sense, by fighting the natural course of things.

In any case, it *feels* like we’re being pulled off center. There we are on that merry-go-round of life, out of balance, feeling out of control, clinging, wishing it would slow down or stop. And yet life keeps moving forward in its round; the circles and the cycles, they continue to spin. Change keeps happening.

It can positively wear us down sometimes. It is easy to understand why we might forget to be merry. Sometimes, we just need a break.

As I said earlier, “requiem” comes from the Latin word meaning “rest.” A requiem is a really a prayer that one who has died will be granted eternal rest. For me, however, it makes more sense as a prayer or wish that we, who are alive – we who are still fully engaged in the living part of life’s cycle – will find rest and peace now, in the midst of our lives.

How do we find that rest in the midst of our merry-go-round ride? We’ve already established that we can’t always – or even often – control our external circumstances. The carousel keeps turning. The question becomes, how can we make our ride more comfortable?

Well, metaphorically speaking once again, what we need is to move ourselves closer to the center, closer to the hub of the wheel, where movement continues, but the sensation of centrifugal force disappears and the feeling of relative stillness abides. We need to find our way to the center and rest there for a while.

Meditation is one way to do that...to take a break and sit still until all that dirt that has been whirling around in our brains – all those thoughts, all those worries – can begin to settle and the water can become clear and still.

Anything that stills the mind and helps us get back to center will do. Donna Schaper uses the term “Sabbath sense” to refer to anything that restores leisure and play to our merry-go-round lives. You may already know what it is that works for you. Maybe today’s Requiem can be a reminder for you to do it – to rest again.

Life is always going to keep moving – the cycles of life keep turning – but we can, as she suggests, reinsert the “merry” back into “merry-go-round,” if we are able to restore a sense of rest, a sense of peace, a sense of play, a sense of centeredness in our everyday lives.

In the days ahead, may we each find time to rest and be restored.