

From the Edge: in Rogationtide

And here we are, still in Virus-tide... learning, growing, serving, praying. There's so much I have reflected on during this time, looking for inspiration, holding onto hope. I am sure it is the same with many of you, trying to stay safe and still serve. And then I received proofs from my publisher for some reflections I did on Rogation Days (approx. April 25-May 25). And so, I share some excerpts of what nurtures and inspires me.

I first learned of Rogation Days while working on an exegesis of Leviticus 25 for a sermon I was giving in the rural church where I served. The more I read – the more excited I became. I knew the farmers in the congregation would be pleased too, to hear about honoring the land and the work they do. I also thought this was the answer for saving our planet Earth, and us, from ourselves. Pollution, global warming, climate change and all the damage humans have inflicted on the earth. The answer was simple – stop and rest!

Since that first sermon on Rogation Days, I have developed a new respect for the idea of Sabbath, not only for the earth, but for us. I now believe Sabbath rest is essential for the land and for our spiritual lives. It is key to growing closer to God. We know fields need to rest between planting seasons, and we need to rest. Sabbath, and unexpected social distancing, offers us time to stay home and step away, to find more innovative ways to share our resources, to restore our spirits, and to become stewards of the gifts we have been given.

Rogation is a word leftover from the days when local farmers were central to community survival and children grew up understanding the earth's cycles and knowing how food and animals grow, and that human health is dependent on the earth's health, what affects one of us affects all of us. Even though many rural churches are still surrounded by fields, Rogation Days are seldom celebrated. Special prayers for thanking God for the fruits of the earth fall under Thanksgiving or Harvest celebrations. Rogation Day has been buried beneath Earth Day and other days of conservation, which *do* help to open our eyes, but plough over the central purpose – our need for Sabbath rest.

I pray you spend some of this time in Virus-tide to reflect on the “tides” that inspire and nurture you, bringing you closer to the One we continue to serve.

A prayer for Rogation Sabbath

O Rogation Sabbath,
welcome us into your silence:
no requirements, no expectations,
only heart meeting heart.

O Sabbath rest,
we take your forgiveness and hope
and lay down our burdens.

We seek your silence,
and when we find it
help us to linger there with you.

O Sabbath peace,
as silence sinks into our souls,
help us to pause in your serenity,
feel the comfort of your presence,
rest a while in your peace.

O Rogation Sabbath,
be with us now
as the world recovers what is lost,
and bring us here again,
into a place of Sabbath rest.

©*Rebeka Maples*