Sacred Play

The other night, an old childhood friend had found me on Facebook and left a message. Sommer shared this memory in her message to me: "Remember when we used to make workout videos to rock 'n roll music, and how we put balloons in our t-shirts to enhance ourselves? I laugh so hard I cry when I remember that!" At first, I could not remember that goofiness from when I was 12 years old. But I took a moment to sort through all the things Sommer and I did, especially in the year that was the bridge between our childhood and adolescence. I remembered climbing the lattice walls of our apartment complex, onto neighbors' balconies. I remembered making picking berries and making jam at Sommer's grandmother's farm. I remembered taking risks, like jumping off the second story deck over our apartment complex's pool, into the 5 ft waters below. And, oh yes, I remembered those exercise music videos we made, trying to look our MTV best, to late 80's bands like The Bangles.

I find it interesting that when I typically think of my life as a 12-year old, I remember mostly the major events that marked me: particularly changing schools and family drama. Sommer reminded me of the day to day play we shared, something that added joy and laughter into my life. I believe God's spirit was at work in that play, opening my imagination, creating a cherished friendship, finding the confidence that comes with taking risks, and whittling away the stress that life factors plus the onset of adolescence brought me.

I have been thinking of ways I still play today. At night, my dog and I play games right before going to bed. I hide somewhere in the apartment—behind a door, under a blanket, crouched in a closet. Once my dog realizes I'm missing, she looks room to room to find me (it doesn't take long). She announces my presence with a playful growl and a bark; I jump out at her and she takes the nearest bone or ball, stretches into downward facing dog position, telling me with her body, "Game on!" I am sure those 10 minutes of play prepare me for a peaceful sleep that renews me.

Theologian Jorgen Moltmann explores the intersection of play and the presence of God in his book *A Theology of Play*. In play, our focus shifts from doing, having and achieving to being and rejoicing. In play, we find freedom and spontaneity. We create space in our minds for the imagination to take control. In doing so, we open ourselves the creative and liberative power of God.

Take a moment today to remember a favorite way you played as a child. Give thanks for those with whom you shared play. Consider the ways that play contributed to your thriving. Think also about how you play now. If play is not part of your life now, are there ways you can build it into your daily rhythm?

It stands out in my mind that despite hunger, homelessness and horror, the children of Haiti continue to play. They play because they must. I pray that play become a balm for them that helps soothe the trauma they have and continue to endure, even as other necessary aid finds its way to Haiti's children and adults.

Holy God, make us open to take delight in your created world. Give us the freedom to forget ourselves and just be, and rejoice, in play. Give us people with whom we can laugh and enjoy. In our play, may we find liberation. May we find you. Amen.

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