

Shavuot 2018 Sermon Slam
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One sunny summer Sunday, when I was around ten years old, it was late in the day, I was home alone, the phone rang and I picked it up; “Naomi, Claire just died, could you tell your mother when she gets home?” I had just been dropped off from the Temple picnic where Claire, her husband and their 4 kids were; my family had all been there at my father’s farm in Uxbridge; now I had to tell my mother that her best friend had died.

I went outside and sat on the porch steps waiting for my parents to get home. Neighbors were sitting outside on this sunny day, kids were riding bikes, or roller-skating, everyone was acting normal like nothing had happened and I wanted to yell at them, “Don’t you know something terrible has happened? How can you act as if everything is the same?”

As I’ve gotten older, several decades older, I, as many of you, have experienced moments like this: when the world just keeps going on when something dreadful happens, when it seems everything and everyone should just stop, take a breath, reset to the moment before, and reclaim what was. But it doesn’t. The world keeps spinning on its axis as it always has.

What can I count on when all seems lost? The love of my family and friends has always been sustaining, but they, like I, only inhabit the world for a limited time. What is timeless?

Each Friday night, Shabbat arrives. Whether I have just been diagnosed with breast cancer, whether I have just lost a parent, whether a family member has just received a tough diagnosis, Shabbat comes. No matter what. We light the candles, say the blessings, drink the wine and eat the challah. And Torah is read the next morning, the words taking on a deeper meaning in the face of loss or confusion, but they are the same words. And we sing the songs, and have Kiddush. And the next holiday comes with all its prescriptions, customs, and family gatherings. And this I can count on, no matter what.



I hate change! I cried when my family moved to another home when I was 7 years old. Many, many years later, I cried when our own children left for preschool, then kindergarten, then for college. I cried when our boys left our beloved pediatrician, cried when I moved to another office after 30 years. Change is painful, and yet I know that everything is temporary, impermanent, here for the time being.

But what I can count on is that Shabbat comes every Friday night, no matter what; and that we read Torah on Saturday morning, and sing the songs and have Kiddush. And the next holiday comes with all its prescriptions, customs and family gatherings. And this holds me, in a soothing way, as time is passing, as I am noticing how brief our lives are.

So back to 1963, on that late sunny summer Sunday afternoon, I am sitting on the steps outside our house, my parents' car pulls into the driveway; they get out. I run to my mother and say, "Mom, Claire just died". She cries. And 6 days later, Shabbat comes. She lights the candles, we say the blessings, drink the wine, eat the challah. No matter what.

And this I can count on.