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Reimagining Rhythms: A Review of The Sacred Pulse

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Reimagining Rhythms: A Review of The Sacred Pulse

Abstract

"We all bear the weight of grief, and Fiet's book challenged me to look more closely at societal responses to the experience."

Posting about the book *The Sacred Pulse* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/reimagining-rhythms-a-review-of-the-sacred-pulse/>

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Reimagining Rhythms: A Review of *The Sacred Pulse*

Erin Olson

January 25, 2022

Title: *The Sacred Pulse: Holy Rhythms for Overwhelmed Souls*

Author: April Fiet

Publisher: Broadleaf Books

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A few weeks ago, I was cleaning out a badly neglected storage room in our basement. While taking a break and with little thought, I sat down at my grandma's piano which was gifted to us when she died a few years ago. I found a copy of a song I knew well and had played for a church offertory quite a few times. I started to play and found that my mental memory enabled me to move my fingers without much thought. I used to play that piano faithfully after lunch at my grandparents' house on Sunday afternoons and even played it regularly once it was moved to our house a few years ago. But up until that afternoon a few weeks ago, I honestly couldn't remember the last time I had played. Before I knew it, as I was playing, I was also crying.

Playing the piano has always been a way for me to connect with my grandma, reignite my love for music, and utilize parts of my brain that don't get as much playing time. Somehow, though, it had been almost a year since I'd taken time to do this thing I enjoy so much. I'm not even sure where the tears came from other than I know they weren't tears of sadness—mostly tears over how badly I'd needed the piano but had neglected this thing I loved so much. Playing piano, along with other things, were part of my holy rhythms from which I had somehow become disconnected.

April Fiet's book, *The Sacred Pulse: Holy Rhythms for Overwhelmed Souls*, was just what I needed to read over the recent semester break. When I first picked it up, I thought for sure I was opening a book full of naval gazing self-help with some religiosity sprinkled on top, but this book was none of that and so much more. Looking at the chapters, I was worried that the book might become another laundry list of things I needed to learn to do or start doing to feel less overwhelmed.

As is true for many of us, the last year and a half has been exhausting. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, our university, like all of them, made a quick transition to online teaching. I was also trying to help my own three kids do school from home, and amid all of this,

our department was planning and preparing for the launch of a new graduate program. Rife with accreditation requirements, starting a new social work program is not for the faint of heart, and while it's been a labor of love, it has demanded a lot of mental energy. I've also, like many others, felt the strain of broken and strained relationships over increasing political and cultural polarizations around the pandemic, presidential elections, and the like. All of these things, along with me creeping toward my mid-40's, has made *tired* and *overwhelmed* seem like the two main descriptors I'd use for myself. I don't think my descriptors are all that unique in our present world and circumstances—I have heard this from many people who, almost two years into the pandemic, are feeling very weary.

The Sacred Pulse was a balm to my weary soul and tired body. Like me, April explains her own time of weariness and how she looked around at others who seemed to be “doing fine” and thought they must just be better at “managing their time.” She states:

“I imagined that some people were just better able to work long days, get little sleep, and eat junk food all day long with little in the way of consequences. I have begun to realize that this isn't true. Some of us are better at hiding our weariness than others, but all of us thrive when we step away from the rhythm of our expectations and tasks and toward

This passage helped me see the people around me from a new perspective—we are all weary. If I can begin to see all people as weary, then my own experience and expectations start to shift significantly. If I treat myself with grace, and be honest and vulnerable about my own weariness, then I begin to recognize the ways I have become disconnected from God's holy rhythm for my life. Fiet's approach was fully compassionate, gracious, and patient, encouraging the reader to begin by taking small steps toward reconnecting with the rhythms of activities such as gardening, shopping, and grief.

Gardening, argues Fiet, can help us reconnect with the rhythm of the seasons while we recognize when and how things were meant to grow. This sustainable practice creates a connection to the food we eat and generates a deeper appreciation for the things we grow. Shopping can connect us with other people if we do not always choose convenience, but instead think about the cost of convenience, which is often our disconnection with where our purchases come from.

April tells a story of a time when she decided to sew her own dress and was surprised to find that the materials she purchased totaled more than the cost of the dress from a store. Many of us likely know this to be true, but how often do we stop to think about why this is? It's usually a signpost of injustice somewhere along the production line. As we learn more about how and by whom our clothes are made, we have recognized that many women and children are working in unsafe conditions, working very long hours, and are paid a pittance for their labor. Does this mean we need to start sewing all our own clothing? That is not feasible for me, and I assume not feasible for many others—but it does mean that when given the opportunity, we

should do research about the purchases we make, and when possible, choose an option that promotes justice for all people involved in the process of making and distributing that item.

What is our relationship with grief? We all bear the weight of grief, and Fiet's book challenged me to look more closely at societal responses to the experience. We may grieve the fact that someone halfway around the globe is enduring injustice just to bring "affordable" clothing to the developed world. Sitting with grief can often move us to action in ways that other emotions cannot, but our western culture is uncomfortable with grief and the process of grieving. April talks about how grief is stigmatized, and that grief and loss are considered "private experiences" (p. 150) that people are willing to hear about for a while, but then it's time to "move on." April writes, "If you took a chance and opened up about your griefs to someone else, the loneliness would be compounded by the pain of learning your griefs were too tender for others to hear. Deep wounds were met with words urging me to move out of sadness and to more comfortable topics." (p. 150)

Grief feels very vulnerable, and we often choose (usually subconsciously) anger as a more comfortable emotion, because it is seen as strength. In a culture uncomfortable with sadness and vulnerability, people are often forced to bury their emotions and mask them with more "appropriate" ones—an emotion easier for other people to understand. Fiet offers the rediscovery and connection with God's holy rhythms as we begin to process our own losses, and she encourages us to be brave enough to confront the stigma that so often urges people to ignore their own grief and the grief of those around them. That day at the piano, I unintentionally reconnected with one of my holy rhythms, and in the process, also grieved the fact that I had become so disconnected from it. I also grieved a bit for the loss of my grandmother, but celebrated the fact that through the piano, I was able to remember her and the joy she found in music. *The Sacred Pulse* is not another to-do list for weary souls and tired bodies, but an invitation to rest and reimagine the rhythms to which God has welcomed us.