

Written Copy: Mark 2:23-28 “How Should I Keep the Sabbath?”

2nd Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 4

Sunday, June 2nd, 2024

Text: Mark 2:23-28

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

The text's intent

When the Pharisees accuse Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath law, Jesus responds by showing them their rigid interpretation and adding to Moses laws violates the reason and purpose behind the giving of the Sabbath as a gift of mercy to His people who must toil and labor in this fallen creation to provide for themselves. The Sabbath is not to be kept and honored as a God, nor by keeping it do people make themselves right with Him. God showed mercy and love in allowing hungry David and his men, on the run from King Saul, to eat bread set aside only for the priests. We honor the Sabbath by worshiping Him and thereby receiving the gifts of mercy He pours out in worship. Jesus shows that gift of saving mercy to the man with the withered hand. He points out that not to heal him on the sabbath is the evil thing, but to heal him is the loving thing that is in keeping with God's will and purpose for all the commandments. Likewise, we are not violating the commandment when we do loving works in service to others, especially those in need. The Pharisees, on the other hand, engage in the most evil violation of the law themselves on the Sabbath as they go off and plot to destroy Jesus and His reputation, and thereby His following.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is God the Son who created all things and rested on the 7th day, giving that rest as the blessed existence for all Creation forever. He is also the Son of Man, the Savior and Redeemer who came to be Lord of the Sabbath, fulfilling the law for us which pointed to Him. He comes to pay the redemption price in His suffering and death that restores us spiritually now to that rest God intended whereby we don't have to work to earn God's favor. And His resurrection is the sign and promise of the complete restoration and redemption of our body and soul that is His gift to us in eternal life, when that original Sabbath rest is restored forever for all who believe and trust in Him.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can break the Sabbath command by refusing to gather for worship when we have the means to do so, when we see our attendance as earning God's favor, or when we use it as an excuse not to serve our Lord by serving those in need around us, forgetting that all of the commands are fulfilled in love for God and one another. We can carry guilt when we don't keep the Sabbath as other Christians demand who have a similar view as the Pharisees.

What the hearer should do as a result:

We observe the Sabbath when we attend Word and Sacrament worship where the Lord of the Sabbath gives us His gifts of grace and mercy that heal and restore us. He doesn't need our presence, rather we need Him and the work the Spirit does in our lives. Because Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath who fulfills all the laws for us we need not observe it like pharisees but instead prayerfully seek to do what fulfills all the commandments: love God and love others.

Subject Sentence: The Sabbath is Jesus' gift of love and mercy to us

Introduction:

Deuteronomy 5:12 **“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.**

What does it mean to observe the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy? And are you doing it? Are we doing it here at Lamb of God? As you ponder that, keep in mind the “Sabbath”, as understood in the Old Testament was Saturday, or more accurately sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. The Orthodox Jews still observe this. But there are those Christian denominations that do as well. Among the best known are the 7th Day Adventist. They do not worship on Sunday as we do, but instead worship on Saturday as they believe the Bible calls all believers to do. They do not recognize any Biblical precedent for worship on Sunday. They not only worship on Saturday but they strictly keep it as a day of rest, avoiding any kind of secular work, although they do make exceptions for medical and humanitarian relief work. Although there are some variations, most Adventists avoid on Saturdays such activities as shopping, sports, and certain forms of entertainment.

Does that mean we should change our day or Worship? As we read through the New Testament and the history of the growth of the Early Church after Pentecost we see the first members, who were mostly Jewish, attending the synagogue on Saturday, but then gathering on Sunday for worship that included prayer, fellowship, Apostolic teaching, and the Lord’s Supper. As the Church spread to the Gentiles, the day of worship changed to just Sunday as a celebration and remembrance of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And as the Holy Spirit made abundantly clear in Paul’s Epistles much of the ceremonial laws like keeping kosher and worship on Saturdays pointed to Christ, and thus were fulfilled by Him. Paul writes in **Romans 14:5** **“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.** The freedom we have in Christ is that we can worship on whatever day works best for all, as long as we gather to honor the Triune God. And he warns us that we shouldn’t judge others for not worshiping on the same day we do. Worship on Sundays is a great way to make each worship service a “Mini-Easter”, even in the Season of Lent.

Okay, given that Sunday is the day, what should that mean for us? What can we do and what should we not do? This was something I struggled with very much when I was a manager at Hillers.

Dealing with Sabbath as Hiller’s Manager

When I first hired in at Hillers working Sundays was not a problem. I was not a practicing Christian, and as a Union Employee Sundays meant earning time and a half. When I became a manager working every 3rd Sunday was required, but at least I wasn’t scheduled to work every single one anymore.

It was when the Lord called me back to Him, and reinstated and rejuvenated my baptismal faith, that working on Sundays became a problem. It was especially troubling when I read the Old Testament Commandments on the Sabbath. It felt even worse listening to one well-meaning fellow Christian who told me I should repent for every Sunday I had to work.

I tried to talk with upper management about them giving me a pass on that every 3rd Sunday schedule. But they refused to budge on it. They told me that was clearly what I signed on for when I became a manager. They pointed out the Jewish employees had to work Saturdays, so it was not discriminatory for them to make me work Sundays. I often wondered if it would've made a difference if Mr. Hiller was an Orthodox Jew instead of a Reformed Jew. And asking to be off the Sunday schedule did not make me very popular with my co-managers either, as you might imagine.

I struggled for a while with guilt over working Sundays. I prayed about it, but there was no easy answer. My family needed me to keep that job for the pay and for the insurance. I was too old to start another trade and lacked the necessary education to switch career paths at that point in my life. I would get up every 3rd Sunday morning, feeling guilty, repenting of what I thought was a sin, along with the fact that Sundays were the hardest days of all in the Grocery industry, the busiest day of the week.

In your life right now, are you keeping the Sabbath? And if anyone was to ask you why you believed you were honoring it, how would you respond? How should you? Let's see what we can learn from our Gospel Lesson

What We Can Learn from Our Gospel Lesson About the Sabbath

We see Jesus and the disciples walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath, most likely headed to the synagogue in Capernaum. They are hungry, and His disciples begin to pluck wheat kernels off the heads of grain and eat them. The Pharisees are there watching. Jesus has done enough to raise red flags in their eyes. He calls Himself a Rabbi sent from God, but he doesn't keep the laws like they do. They want to discredit Him by showing Him to be a sinner. So, they ask Him why He allows His disciples to do what is not lawful on the Sabbath.

Now it's important to know this about their charge that the disciples were breaking the law. There is no law given by Moses, or anywhere else in Scripture, that says plucking off wheat kernels and eating them was against God's laws. What they were guilty of violating is the man-made laws the Pharisees and Scribes came up with on their own. They worried about what God really meant when He said the Sabbath was a day of rest when no one was to do any work. What consists of work then? The Pharisees came up with their own guidelines about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. And for them harvesting grain was breaking their law, and therefore was violating God's Sabbath Law.

But whenever man adds to God's words of Scripture what is not there, he runs into trouble. And that is the case with their judgment that what the disciples were doing was work. Moses actually wrote that when you plant a grain field you should leave the rows closest to the road unharvested to feed those who passed by who might be hungry. And he wrote that what is not permitted on the Sabbath is to take a sickle or some other farm implement and harvest grain. Plucking the kernels with your hand is not included in that prohibition.

Jesus could've used this argument against them, but He didn't. Instead, he chose a story that pointed to the heart of where the Pharisees were going wrong with their excessive legalism. He cited the account of David was a hero to these Jews. He was the greatest king Israel ever had, the one to whom God promised the Messiah would come as one of his descendants. David was the one God called "a man after His own heart". Jesus reminds them of when David showed up at the Tabernacle and asked for the Bread of the Presence: the twelve loaves that represented the 12 tribes of Israel that were placed in the Holy place before the Lord symbolizing Israel's constant presence before Him. The laws given to Moses stipulated that only the priest and his family were to eat this bread.

It seems here that beloved David actually violated one of God's written commands. So why wasn't David punished? Because our God is not a legalistic Pharisee. He is a God of mercy and grace. David and his men were on the run for their lives. They didn't have time to eat before they took off on the run. They were famished. It wasn't that they needed a snack, they had a great need. And the Lord chose to provide for that need with this special bread as His gracious gift to this future king. As Jesus tells these Pharisees in Matthew's account of this instance in **Matthew 12:7 And if you had known what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.** David was guiltless, and so were the disciples because our God is a merciful and gracious God. And as Jesus will go on to point out all the laws are fulfilled with love for God and love for one another, something the Pharisees were lacking in their strict legalism.

Sabbath Made for Man, and Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He makes a very bold claim, one that no doubt angered these Pharisees even more than His lesson on the great King David. **Mark 2:27-28** ⁷ **And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."**

What does Jesus mean by saying “**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath**”? To understand let’s think back to where the Sabbath was first mentioned in the book of Genesis Chapter 2. We are told that after creating everything and declaring all things “very good”, or in other words, perfect, the LORD God rested from His creating work. The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word for cease, desist, rest. Originally the Sabbath rest was not supposed to be for just one day. It was intended to be mankind’s eternal existence living in the perfect Garden of Eden. That all ended when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and God placed a curse on the ground and on their lives. From then on mankind’s work to earn a living was marked with thorns and thistles, with toil and suffering.

But the LORD is a loving and Gracious God. He declared the first Sabbath as His gift of love to His most precious creatures: mankind. And to His precious people Israel He restored that Sabbath rest as by declaring through Moses in our Old Testament Lesson that the 7th day was to be their day of Sabbath renewal. Man was not created to honor or worship the Sabbath as a god, or as the means to be right with God. Rather God created and set aside the Sabbath as His gift to mankind. They were called not just to rest from the work of earning a living, but to come into His presence and worship Him. They were called to remember and confess Him as the Mighty Redeeming God who saved them from slavery in Egypt with mighty acts, not because they deserved it, but because He loved them.

That same God was standing before the Pharisees and the disciples. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man, meaning the promised Messiah, was also God the Son, the very God who gave the first Sabbath and its renewal. He is the God who became man to restore that Sabbath rest in all its fullness for you by paying the redemption price for you and all mankind. He became man to suffer and die on the cross removing from you the crushing burden of your sins. He removed from you the work of trying to be right with God by keeping His commands. He showed you just how much He loved you by willingly becoming your atoning sacrifice.

And with His resurrection He brings to your heart and spirit that Sabbath rest. He brings to you the peace of knowing you are now right with God. And through His resurrection you have the promise of the complete restoration of that eternal Sabbath rest to come. By faith you are to know and hold fast that the door to the restoration of that original Sabbath rest in the perfect Garden has been opened to you. When Christ returns your body and soul will be restored to a perfection you have never known before. And you and all those who believe in Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath will live in that Sabbath rest, in the restored Garden of Eden in the New Heavens and New Earth.

How We as Christians Honor the Sabbath as Holy

So, given this unbelievable gift of love, how should we go about honoring the Sabbath now so as to keep it holy? First of all, we are not to keep it like Pharisees as the way to be right with God. We are to see it as the Lord of the Sabbath's gracious gift to us.

We should refrain from the kind of work that serves to build our kingdom and fill our pockets with extra cash so that we can buy not needs but wants and desires. We should instead spend that time worshiping the Lord. In doing so we remember that God doesn't need us to worship Him. We desperately need to come into His presence and worship Him. And He desires us to do so because He has loving gracious gifts to give us. Through the Word and the Sacrament His Spirit works to deliver that wonderful peace we have as God's much loved, redeemed, and forgiven children. He gives that faith and assurance to us pouring it out in bucket loads through His real presence in the Divine Service in the means of grace: His Word preached, read, and sung, and in His Sacrament. Just as Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in our Gospel Lesson, He comes to heal our withered soul with His grace and mercy.

He gathers us together in this place so that we might build one another up in the fellowship we have here in worship, and together afterward in what we say and do as His Church in ministry and mission. His Spirit works through each of us to build up one another to deliver that Sabbath rest to those outside of these walls that really need to hear it in the Gospel Message.

Conclusion

So, how did I make peace with having to work on Sundays as a Hiller's manager? I made sure I attended worship every Sunday morning. When I became a Deacon, I filled in with Word and Sacrament worship at a vacant congregation near the Hillers store that I worked at. This meant that I volunteered to always take the closing shift on Sundays, so my mornings were open for the Lord. This meant Sunday was a very long and tiring day. But at the same time, it meant I was setting aside time to praise and worship Him and work for His glory in His kingdom. And what about when I came in to work? It was a lot like the disciples picking grain, or even David eating the special Bread of the Presence. It was something I had to do to keep food on the table for my family. But there was something else I started doing. I would try to make that a day not so much a day to get my own work done, but be out on the floor and available to help customers. And I made sure I pitched in and helped employees especially at closing time getting all the work done in preparation for the new week. In doing that I was trying to show love to My Lord and Savior, the Lord of the Sabbath, as well as my fellow man. I didn't do it perfectly by any means. But when and where I fell short, I knew I was forgiven.

How about you? How can you honor the Sabbath? You are doing it today. You've set aside and sacrificed your time to gather here in person with us, to join us in worshiping our Lord and Savior, and to receive God's gracious gifts poured out. You do this not to be saved, but because you are saved by the blood of the Lamb. Be built up in your faith so you can be a part of spreading that Sabbath rest outside of this Sanctuary as you attend to your weekly duties. But also, as your schedule allows, join us being a part of the ministry of this Church. Reach out to others so they, through the Spirit working in you, might join us in that eternal Sabbath rest to come. Amen.