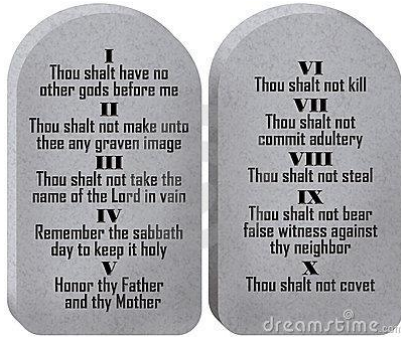


Sermon - June 3, 2018 - Pentecost 2

“Remember the Sabbath Day”

Mark 2:23–3:1–6



Dear friends may the grace and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be with each one of you as he calls us to rest in him.

The wife of a rich man who died assumed they had plenty of money so she gave him a very nice funeral and a fancy tombstone that said, “Rest in Peace.” However, when the estate was settled she learned that he had wasted all their money on gambling and bad investments. This made her so angry she took the little money she had and added three words to the tombstone. The new tombstone read: “Rest in Peace ... Until I Come!” Now, you and I don’t need a tombstone to tell us to rest in peace. We need Jesus for he is the Lord of Sabbath.

Now, most of us probably know what “fake news” is, the type of “yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate misinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional print and broadcast news media or online social media. Fake news is written and published with the intent to mislead in order to damage an agency, entity, or person, and/or gain financially or politically, often using sensationalist, dishonest, or outright fabricated headlines to increase readership, online sharing, and Internet click revenue. It is intentionally misleading and deceptive”

Now, can you believe that even in Jesus time “fake News” was also a practice? In today’s Gospel we see a powerful and influential political party, the Pharisees, who practicing “fake news” to suit their ongoing efforts to destroy Jesus’ reputation and credibility. The issue was the Sabbath day, and while abuses of the Sabbath were and are still common, Jesus sets the record straight, directing our attention to the Gospel.

The Sabbath is one often misunderstood topics in the Bible. Given that is God’s Command, as we hear in the third commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy.” People either become so legalistic on the command, or simply don’t obey it, that is because they miss the point of the commandment.

The Pharisees had become very legalistic adding more to the commandment. And to uphold their rule, in this text of the Gospel, they resorted to “fake news.”

This is what happened. The text tells us that Jesus and his disciples “made their way” through a grain field (v 23). The disciples were hungry and plucked heads of grain to eat, in itself permissible (Deut 23:25), no problem there. Added to that there established rules specifically against reaping. Now, still so far so good. But now, the Pharisees, went farther and thought that under the rule against reaping on the Sabbath, plucking and eating the grains, was unlawful because it meant they were not only plucking the ears but also rubbing it between their hands to separate the grain, and that was a kind of reaping, therefore it was illegal, they were braking the commandment. That part was the “fake news.”

The punishment for reaping on the Sabbath was offering a sacrifice if the reaping was done in ignorance or being stoned to death if it was done purposefully. The

Pharisees saw this as an opportunity to find serious fault with Jesus, and so, it was a great opportunity to condemn him. That was what they looking for as they followed Jesus around, they were to get him and his disciples.

So when they so what the disciples were doing, they immediately applied their strict interpretation of their rules to the disciples' activity, the Pharisees thought they could find fault with Jesus for allowing his followers to disregard and break the rules: "Look! Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (v 24).

Now Jesus of course grabs the opportunity to straighten things and from this "fake news," he directs his followers to good news, the Good News. And that good news tells of the truth about the Sabbath. It existed for man, not man for the Sabbath. It was a day to be set aside each week for physical rest and spiritual care. The Sabbath does not mean for a person to be idle or engaging in one's hobbies, not really. It is true that our bodies need physical rest, but normally that is found during the night hours when we are in bed, but true rest is found in our relationship with God and that relationship is seen in our spiritual care, in his church, in worship, and the gifts God provides there in.

That's what the Sabbath means, it is a divine provision for man's overall benefit, that is rest and spiritual care. The Sabbath not only highlights man's dignity, but also his uniqueness in God's sight, and it is for all humans, it wasn't for the Jews alone, but for all humanity.

Now, as Jesus lead the Pharisees to the Good News, he shows them that he, as the Christ, is above the Law and that he came to atone for its consequences of that law for humankind. With that Jesus trumped any legal charges the Pharisees might have attempted to bring forward to destroy Jesus' reputation and credibility.

And also the Good News revealed the Pharisees true colors, that they were not defending a biblical view of the Sabbath, but a manmade rule which they had devised. That they had regarded optional religious rituals as more important than legitimate human needs. The Pharisees in their effort to protect the Sabbath had trivialised it, distorted it, and made it a day of joyless conformity to their ideas.

But Jesus throws all of that away, instead shows them that his disciples had not done anything wrong when they ate of the grain. If normally-forbidden food is available, it is right for hungry people to eat it. Kind David did it when he was leading an army of hungry soldiers, on his way to take the throne of Israel, and it was ok then. But now, it is Jesus, who is above David, the Creator and Sustainer of all, is being accused of breaking the Law. But of course the Pharisees failed to recognize that Jesus was on his way to a throne also. The King had come and is about to seat on his throne, and in a similar manner he allowed his disciples to eat as they were walking through the field of grains. But, criticising his disciples and accusing him, the Pharisees were expressing rebellion against the God, the very God they professed to serve.

Today, dear friends, is important to recognize that the "fake news" regarding the Sabbath still continues. And happens in several ways. We have those accusers similar to the Pharisees who, proud for having not missed a Sunday's worship for countless years, who think and even say that in doing so are better Christians than others. Then we have others who are the opposite and to suit themselves say: "I don't really need to go to church to hear the same thing over and over again" or "I can find physical

relaxation and worship God on the golf course, at a soccer field, or in the great outdoors just as well as the pew-sitter in a church building, and probably even better!"

Such attitudes toward God's Third Commandment can only result in carelessness regarding not just the third commandment, but all of them, therefore remove God from their priority list. But by doing so, they miss out, it costs them the opportunity to receive the encouragement of fellow Christians and above all the power of God's Word, the Spirit led Gospel, to strengthen their faith and life.

And there is a third group who still insist that for Christians to be true Christians, we must worship on Saturday, because it is God's commandment, confusing the Sabbath with a day, Saturday, like the 7th Day Adventist, who even follow the Old Testament dietary rules, and accuse us of worshiping on a manmade ordinance to worship on Sunday, and that worshiping on Sunday is even the mark of the beast. We do see Pharisees all over again!

For this reason we need to remember what the Sabbath means for us.

It means, first, that the Sabbath was created for man, provided by God to satisfy important needs for all of us, a day for physical rest and spiritual restoration.

How much rest are you getting? Do you ever tired and stressed out? Someone wrote: "This is the age of the half-read page; a quick hash and a mad dash; The bright nights with the nerves tight; the plane hop and the brief stop; the lamp tan in a short span; the big shot in a soft spot; the brain strain and the heart pain; the cat naps 'til the spring snaps; then the fun's done."

That's our life isn't it? We are overworked! We need rest! But not just physical, we need above all spiritual rest. Because of the lack of spiritual rest is that we are overworked, don't you think so?

Second, the Sabbath, means true rest and true rest is found in Jesus Christ alone. That's why Jesus claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath. That means He's the expert about it. Jesus didn't come to cancel the Old Testament law; He came to fulfill it. Every single Old Testament law must now be examined under the Lordship of Jesus.

And it is in Jesus that we gather on Sunday, is not so much about the day, but in whom we gather. And if Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, then he is the Lord of our rest, in fact he is our rest. Therefore when we do keep the Sabbath on Sunday, gathered in Church, we do gather for mutual encouragement, but above all we have the opportunity to hear no less than God's Spirit-laden Word and its reminder of the work of Jesus as he made his way to the cross, all the more important as we "see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:25).

Jesus is our rest. And as Rest he gives it to us in two ways: first, he gives us rest from striving to earn salvation – instead of working for it, we receive it freely by trusting in him. And once saved, we continue to experience rest by learning from him, and by leaning on him, and that is what we should do in order to enjoy the Sabbath. In other words, by resting in the finished work of Christ for salvation we fulfill God's Sabbath.

So if "Shabbat" means rest, what would be the opposite? Work. There are millions of people who are still "working" to earn their salvation. They go to church, read the Bible, pray, help people and do good deeds all in the hope that one day God will look at them and declare them good enough to enter heaven. They haven't entered the Sabbath rest, no, but true rest begins with these words: "your sins are forgiven for

Jesus' sake; go in peace." And in that peace is that we are able to serve others, freely, lovingly and greatly!

How sad, not to mention serious, it is when we fail to make use of opportunities to come together to celebrate together what God has done for us and to receive assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. A wealthy churchman was once approached by a church college fund-raiser to ask for a sizeable contribution for the school's endowment fund. The churchman responded: "No thanks. I don't like strawberries." Surprised by the response, the fund-raiser asked what strawberries had to do with his request for a contribution. The churchman explained: "When you don't want to do something, any excuse will do." Such is the nature of all excuses not to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

Thank God for the Son of Man, who on the day in our text made his way through the wheat field on his way to saving us from false pride or lame excuses regarding the Sabbath, along with all of our other sins. Your sins are forgiven. You may go in peace. Amen.