

2024 Sabbath Mark 2

What if someone was to ask you: “You folks say you want to keep the commandments of God, don’t you? And yet there you sit, snug in your padded pews, on a Sunday! Don’t you know the Sabbath (Hebrew for rest) was the seventh day? Saturday! Why do you try and keep the other commandments but not the third one about the sabbath day?”

I can’t speak for you, but I think a good answer might be: “We do keep the third commandment. And we are keeping it as we speak, right here, on a Sunday. And if you doubt it, you can ask Jesus about it.”

So how is it that we keep the Sabbath commandment even on a Sunday? Well, a bit of review: Christ has fulfilled the Old Covenant on our behalf and so he has become our High Priest, our Once for all Sacrifice, our Temple, our Purity, our Robes of Righteousness, and, relevant to today, he has become our rest - our sabbath.

We read in our Old Testament lesson that the Sabbath was given for two reasons. Not because God is a narcissist and needs cheerleading once a week for his ego. No, the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. It was made, as we read, for our rest and, as Luther emphasizes in the catechism, to remember God’s Work for us. And as we receive his gifts, we receive the promised rest, because it means we don’t have to work for salvation, and so in receiving those gifts we thus fulfill the sabbath command.

So we join a long line of Christians, starting from the witnesses of the resurrection in the upper room, who on Sundays, the day of the resurrection, gathered and there Jesus came among them. And does he not do the same today where two or more are gathered in his Name (which is why

we do that invocation), and where his body and blood are? And would it not be the same any other day of the week?

This is why Paul can write of our Christian freedom in the NT - thanks to Jesus' fulfilling of the laws commandments, all of them, by the way, not just this one - he writes: Col 2: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ."

"Of Christ," who, we already mentioned, is here. And, again, why is he here? Not just to receive our worship and praise, along with some offerings (which he does deserve and we do offer, by the way). But are worship and praise and offerings offered to appease him? As if he is a pagan god who we must be nice to or else he will be mean to us?

No, we offer worship and praise and offering because he is worthy of them, firstly, and because he first loved us. He made us, he fulfilled what we could not, he died for us (that already happened so how could we possibly have to earn or pay or work for his favor like some pagan religion?), and after that great display of love he is risen to give life eternal.

In short, He is here, and he is here to offer *us* something. To serve *us* something. His word, sacrament, and promises – his rest. Because if he is offering us his promises and work, well that means it's HIS work, not our work, which means we don't have to work our way to him, we don't have to work for his favor, we don't have to work at all. Which means we can rest.

Rest here, weary traveler. God is not out to get you. He has worked to save you. And still does. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matt 11. Until the end when we join him in the final day, the final sabbath day. Hebrews 4 "There remains then a

sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work just as God did from his."

And yet we will still find some way to manufacture some work. "Someone surely has to do something!" We cry. And we remember: "Faith without works is dead!" Yes, but which of those works are going to earn you anything? Besides, you have six other days to work and be about the work, sit for one hour and rest. Fall asleep if you like. At least then you don't get to use your "sermon listening" as a good work, yeah you don't get credit, because you slept through it, and good because Church isn't about credit – its about gifts.

Still, we are independent people, we "pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps and made our own legacy" (which I think is usually a lie - we cannot count how many people helped us, or "lucky" breaks that went our way). But nonetheless we want to do something! And so even a gift like rest we try to turn into a guilt trip or a sin.

And when we do that, we are no different than the pharisees. Who managed to take a commandment about rest, for the benefit of God's people and that they might remember God's goodness - they managed to make that into a burden to carry.

There is no law in the bible against picking heads of grain on the sabbath. There is a man-made law in rabbinic tradition against it. Same with pushing buttons on an elevator. That is not a joke, they consider that "work" on the sabbath. And so they make rest into a work and in doing so you miss out on the Work of Christ.

And so Jesus does not forbid his disciples from picking grain as they follow him. That is exactly what they, and we, should be doing! The Savior is among us, let us feast! Let us follow him!

Commandment fulfilled indeed!

But Jesus takes it further. He brings up David and the showbread. Now this is significant, remember how there is no law against picking grain on the sabbath? Well, there IS a law about eating the showbread. That bread is ONLY for the priests. And yet David and his men, starving, eat it. And God doesn't strike them down! And Jesus brings this event up. To show what? That God longs for the good of people. And to quote Dr. Voelz from his Mark commentary God won't "sweat the small stuff" in that regard.

Now is this an excuse to ignore God's laws? No, and he knows hearts. So let's be reverent. And neither do we use this as an excuse to never come at all, "since it isn't a mandate", no Hebrews still encourages us to "not be in the habit of not meeting together" remember this is for our good! Why despise it!?

And, above all, lets not miss the point of Jesus' argument: If God can overlook, or forgive, an actual law in an emergency, why should we condemn one another based on our manmade laws?

And so we sit and think, "yeah take that pharisees with your manmade laws." But do we fail to consider how we judge people based on opinion, or things not in scripture? And please, this is not a "Christians shouldn't judge" sermon, no, no. This is: "Judge rightly, according to God's Word, not our laws and views." It's that person who is just odd. It's that person who is poor. It's that person who does the polity, that isn't specified in scripture, different. It's how much hatred and toxicity we stir up and participate in in politics. And that is not to say those laws don't intersect with God's laws on life, and sexuality, and the refugee and the poor. It is to say, we do a whole lot of work, not rest, work, to divide and revile and self justify don't we?

And so this commandment calls us back to the heart of God. That is for people to be fed in His Word and goodness. And to find rest there.

And boy do we need it, don't we? Could you use a little rest? To be filled up? Not just with emotion, but with lasting courage, and hope, and meaning?

Seems like Paul could use a little in this broken world. Look at what he describes: We are afflicted, crushed, persecuted, struck down, and we carry in us the body of death. Ever felt like that? If so... rest a little! Be fed the news that, because of Christ and his victory for you, you will not be crushed, not driven to despair, not forsaken, not destroyed, and the life of Jesus is manifest in your body. Even now!

Sabbath is for man, not man for the sabbath. And Jesus is true man, humankind reduced to One as the Son of Man. Which means the Sabbath is for him. And he, Lord of the Sabbath, has said this commandment is for your good. That his truth and mercy might be yours. He says, "Go ahead and eat some grain, disciples, as you follow me."

Even more we know he, the Son of Man, is also the Son of God, there in the beginning, the maker of all creation, he was there on that first seventh day of Rest. And he, risen and ascended now says, even as you fall short, that he has worked to wash you clean, that you might enter his Sabbath rest for free, and forever. Rejoice in His Work and in His Gifts. The first day, the seventh day - Every day. They are always there in his word and sacrament, they never run short, and they are for you. In Jesus name, Amen.