

“Sabbath Time”

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UCC at The Villages, FL
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Deuteronomy 5:1-12
Mark 2:23-3:6

[Jesus said,]

“People were not made for the good of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for the good of people.

Mark 2:27b[CEV]

Let us pray... O God,

We thank you that you have made taking time to rest as a priority for us,
established in the story of Creation and as one of the 10 Commandments.

Help us to recognize those real needs to rest and heal, to feed body and soul
as we need to stay healthy and whole human beings.

Amen

‘Sabbath’ is an ancient term synonymous with Sunday as a day of worship...
for Christians, that is.

For Jewish people, the Sabbath begins on Friday at sundown
and goes to sundown on Saturday.

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/sabbath>

The word for Saturday in Spanish is ‘Sabado’

which is derived from the Hebrew word for “Sabbath”, “Shabbath”
which originally meant, “He rested”...

<http://www.aulahispanica.com/node/187>

Whether we are talking about the Jewish day of worship

or the Christian day of worship, the Sabbath originally meant a day of rest.

Oh, and for the ‘rest’ of the Western world, we are talking about a “weekend”.

Thank you, God !

‘Blue laws’ – or ‘Sunday laws’ in this country, were meant to prohibit
certain activities – like working and shopping.

Stores were generally closed.

Selling alcohol in particular, was forbidden and

that was true for Indiana up until February of this year!

When I was living in Germany in the early 1980s,

stores and even restaurants were closed.

Though most Germans were not religious, Sunday was considered sacred

as a day for being with family – often that meant participating in volksmarches
or hiking for fun as a family on country roads.

In this country, the US Supreme Court has upheld blue laws –

fortunately for the sake of working people and students,
that there be weekends!

So, “Thank God [when] it’s Friday [literally]!”

Can you imagine a world going 24/7 with no break? Well, maybe we can...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_law

Willard, p.2

Observing the Sabbath as a day of rest has been very important
for Christian communities throughout the centuries –
even strictly observed up until recent years.

Eric Liddell famously refused to run in the 100 meters race
at the 1924 Olympics in Paris because it was to be held on the Sabbath.

He was true to his beliefs as a devout Christian –
and this is commendable as an individual discipline,
but certainly, it is not a generally held view these days
in society or even the church itself.

Some might lament this as a steady decline in social morals –
right along with the casual use of obscenities in the media.

Perhaps such decline is accurate, or maybe we might consider a broader view –
that the next generation is testing old values to see what works.

Maybe we just haven't hit bottom yet
for what is inappropriate and for what is acceptable –
though I think we are getting pretty close!

Perhaps we have Jesus to “blame” for this attitude of testing social norms
to see what is real...

I love this story as it sets up a narrative about a day in the life of Jesus –
that happens to be a Sabbath day.

It is an adventure about the importance of customs and the dangers of exclusion,
the possibilities of being open to change – and to reconcile,
as well as the priority we *should* give to real needs
like hunger and health problems.

Now the disciples knew better as observant Jews,
but they did it anyway – scooping up grains of wheat
as they walked along through a field on their way to synagogue,
and enjoying some instant granola!

There is something whimsical about eating food you find off the land,
and apparently nobody was concerned about who owned that land
from which the disciples were just helping themselves
to the grain growing there.

These days around here, we would have to pay to do that.

You would have to go to a farm or orchard where they would let you pick
blueberries, oranges, strawberries, or peaches – and pay for it.

In the fall up north, you could go apple-picking or get your own pumpkin,
but you would still have to pay for it.

By the way, though the gardeners of our community garden, respect
each other's plots, they are very generous to share out of each other's harvest.

Willard, p.3

The Pharisees, though, were only concerned about “doing work on the Sabbath” as a violation of the 4th Commandment.

They have made up their minds that Jesus was a troublemaker and they are alert to his flaunting of laws that were otherwise, seriously observed.

For the most part, there was community consensus about this – if for no other reason, than simply because... it was a tradition!

In the musical, “Fiddler on The Roof”, Tevye a peasant milkman sings about how ‘tradition’ allows the Jewish community to maintain their balance, especially amidst a hostile Russian society.

Traditions about the Sabbath and the dietary customs of the Jews have helped them maintain their cultural identity, throughout their history wherever they lived – whether that was among Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Germans, Russians, and Americans.

However, laws – whether they are civil or customary, can be taken advantage of in any community by a privileged few.

Back in Jesus’ day of the 1st Century (CE), the Jewish community was oppressed by Roman occupation, but also pressured by their own leaders.

The scribes and Pharisees, high priests and Herodians made sure the under-privileged majority observed Sabbath laws, dietary restrictions, paid temple offerings – including such services as animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins...

Jesus was a troublemaker, getting people to think and not just put up with hypocrisy and abuse, but to dare to reach out for opportunities to make their lives better – even though the cost could be high. This is still the case...

In the beginning of Mark Chapter 2, Jesus heals a paralyzed person who had been lowered through the roof of his mother’s home in Capernaum.

But he did it by saying, “Your sins are forgiven.”

This created an uproar by religious experts sitting there, because – according to religious protocol, only God can forgive – through priestly rituals.

Theologically speaking, Jesus was acting *as God* to forgive this person’s sins, but he was also technically upsetting the Temple industry of animal sacrifice without even requiring so much as a promise for a change in behavior!

<http://users.wfu.edu/horton/r327/Chapter%203.pdf>

Willard, p.4

In today's Gospel lesson,

Jesus permits the disciples to 'work on the Sabbath' by plucking grain to eat,
but then he heals a person with an undeveloped hand –
which is another kind of 'work on the Sabbath'.

All he did was to tell this person to reach out –
and seize that healing that was so desperately needed.

Carpe diem !

However, this so infuriates the Pharisees, that they rush out of there
to plot how they are going to kill Jesus –
which is another kind of 'work on the Sabbath',
but they don't even see it that way...

How often does that kind of 'work' get a "free pass"
in our society's thinking and behavior?

This was exactly what Jesus was pointing out
to those holy people in the Capernaum synagogue:
*"On the Sabbath should we do good deeds or evil deeds?
Should we save someone's life or destroy it?"*

But they just sat there and festered in their righteousness!

Jesus adds "feeding the hungry" and "healing the afflicted"
to his list of "offenses" to the status quo.

He was provoking the powers to see that
rational loving-kindness corresponds to a higher law
that supersedes the enforcement of custom.

Jesus was also reminding us to thank God
for making Sabbath time a priority for us;
and that the purpose of the Sabbath
is to meet the real needs all people have
to rest and heal, to feed body and soul
as a necessity for us... to be healthy human beings.

Amen

Our lesson today from Deuteronomy 5:1-12 is a reaffirmation of God's saving relationship with the people of God and declares the first four of the Ten Commandments up to honoring the Sabbath Day...

¹Moses called together the people of Israel and said:

Today I am telling you the laws and teachings that you must follow,
so listen carefully.

²The LORD our God made an agreement with our nation at Mount Sinai.

³That agreement wasn't only with our ancestors
but with us, who are here today.

⁴The LORD himself spoke to you out of the fire,

⁵but you were afraid of the fire and refused to go up the mountain.

So I spoke with the LORD for you, then I told you that he had said:

⁶I am the LORD your God, the one who brought you out of Egypt
where you were slaves.

⁷Do not worship any god
except me.

⁸Do not make idols
that look like anything in the sky or on earth
or in the ocean under the earth.

⁹Don't bow down and worship idols.

I am the LORD your God, and I demand all your love.

If you reject me and worship idols,

I will punish your families for three or four generations.

¹⁰But if you love me and obey my laws,

I will be kind to your families for thousands of generations.

¹¹Do not misuse my name.

I am the LORD your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name.

¹²Show respect for the Sabbath Day—
it belongs to me.

¹³You have six days when you can do your work,

¹⁴but the seventh day of the week belongs to me, your God.

No one is to work on that day—

not you, your children, your oxen or donkeys or any other animal,
not even those foreigners who live in your towns.

And don't make your slaves do any work.

¹⁵This special day of rest will remind you

that I reached out my mighty arm and rescued you from slavery in Egypt.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Mark 2:23-3:6

²³ One Sabbath Jesus and his disciples were walking through some wheat fields.
His disciples were picking grains of wheat as they went along.

²⁴ Some Pharisees asked Jesus,
“Why are your disciples picking grain on the Sabbath?
They are not supposed to do that!”

²⁵ Jesus answered,
“Haven’t you read what David did when he and his followers
were hungry and in need?

²⁶ It was during the time of Abiathar the high priest.
David went into the house of God and ate the sacred loaves of bread
that only priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his followers.”

²⁷ Jesus finished by saying,
“People were not made for the good of the Sabbath.
The Sabbath was made for the good of people.

²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath.”

The next time that Jesus went into the meeting place,
a man with a crippled hand was there.

² The Pharisees wanted to accuse Jesus of doing something wrong,
and they kept watching to see if Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath.

³ Jesus told the man to stand up where everyone could see him.

⁴ Then he asked,
“On the Sabbath should we do good deeds or evil deeds?
Should we save someone’s life or destroy it?”

But no one said a word.

⁵ Jesus was angry as he looked around at the people.
Yet he felt sorry for them because they were so stubborn.

Then he told the man,
“Stretch out your hand.”

He did, and his bad hand was healed.

⁶ The Pharisees left.

And right away they started making plans with Herod’s followers to kill Jesus.