

“Sabbath-Time”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
August 21st, 2016
14th Sun./Pentecost

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

[Jesus said,]

*“Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie [their] ox or [their] ass
from the manger, and lead it away to water it?”*

Luke 13:15^b

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to find that sacred place and that Sabbath-time when we can be with you
and receive that daily spiritual bread we need to keep going.

Thank you for this beautiful church where we can gather every Sunday
to be reminded of your mighty works through Christ
and how you are still speaking to us in our time.

Amen

Here is a story I tell from Mark that is similar to our Gospel lesson:

*Jesus arrived on the Sabbath day, going through fields of wheat;
and his disciples had come along and proceeded to pluck heads of grain
to eat.*

Now, the Pharisees – ultraconservatives, said to him,

“See here! Why are they doing work that is not permissible on the Sabbath?”

Jesus answered them,

*“Don’t you recall what David did when he was desperate and hungry –
and for those who followed him?”*

*When Abiathar was high priest, how was it right for David
to enter the house of God and eat the consecrated bread
which no one but the high priest is permitted to eat?*

Yet he ate it and so did those who followed him.”

And he said to them all,

*“The Sabbath was created for the sake of humanity
and not humanity for the Sabbath.*

*Therefore, the one who is the Son of Man the true Heir of Humanity
is also the Lord of the Sabbath –
the day for remembering the multitudes of Creation.”*

So, Jesus entered the synagogue at Capernaum...

Now a man with an undeveloped hand was there,

*and the Pharisees waited to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath –
so they could bring charges against him.*

Jesus said to the man with the unformed hand,

“Come! Stand in our midst.”

Willard, p.2

And he said to them all,

“Is it ‘permissible’ on the Sabbath

to do something nice or to do something evil?

To save a life or take one?”

*But they festered in silence, and Jesus looked around at them,
bitterly grieved at the hardness of their hearts.*

He said to the man,

“Stretch out your hand.”

So, he stretched it out... and his hand was regenerated!

*And immediately, the Pharisees went out to ‘work’ on
how they would destroy Jesus...*

Here are two conflicting notions of the Sabbath:

One that respects the sacramental purity of keeping the Sabbath
as a ‘no work’ zone.

The other, that allows for breaking Sabbath rules
when it makes life’s challenges easier.

Somehow, the Sabbath is about both

respectful observance and restful reflection...

Jesus set a good example for pastors by frequently going on retreats –
to take some “sabbath-time”.

He would get away from the world’s demands swirling around him
in order to pray, rest, and refresh himself.

On one of these journeys, he was so tired from teaching and healing people,
he fell asleep in the back of a boat during a storm!

Many churches recognize the need to offer their pastors time away
as a formal “sabbatical” for three months or more
usually after so many years of service.

I myself have made a point to take mini-sabbaticals over the years –
usually to go to the Network of Biblical Storytellers Festival Gathering,
often as part of a road trip
and I am told that I come back visibly renewed.

Our church has generously provided me with a 3 month sabbatical
after 5 years service and by April of next year,
I will have been with you as a congregation for 7 years.

It so happens that God commanded the Israelites to

observe an agricultural sabbatical every seven years, for the sake of the land.

This is called the “Sh-e-mita” and is prescribed in Leviticus chapter 25

as an opportunity for the arable land to lie fallow and replenish itself.

It is also for the sake of poor people to freely glean or gather what they can for food.
Slaves are also to be given their freedom after seven years.

Willard, p.3

By the way, the same chapter also calls for every 50th year to be a “jubilee” or celebration of redemption when

loans – between Israelites, that is, are to be forgiven;
and original owners have the first option to buy back their land.

The word ‘sabbatical’ comes from ‘Sabbath’ – a Hebrew word that means ‘rest’ and the Sabbath is the Jewish day of rest.

The Jewish Sabbath is the seventh day of the week –
traditionally Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

Sunday is our ‘Sabbath’ day when we worship God together as Christians –
remembering the first day of the week when Jesus was resurrected.

The Jewish Sabbath recalls the Creation story in Genesis
when God made Heaven and Earth and rested on the seventh day.

In a conversation I had one time with

Imam Abdurrahman Sykes, who is well known to our congregation,
I learned that the Muslims don’t believe God *needed* to rest.

Therefore, they don’t have a ‘Sabbath’ day of rest in their tradition,
though they still gather for prayers on Fridays at 12:00 noon.

While working on a paraphrase of Mark 2:23-28 for Biblical storytelling,
I got the word, ‘Sabbath’, which means ‘rest’, confused with

‘Sabaoth’, which means ‘hosts’ or ‘armies’.

I had equated ‘The Lord of the Sabbath’ with ‘Lord Sabaoth’ or ‘The Lord of Hosts’;
The titles are not the same, but both describe the same ‘Lord’ as God.

Then, I realized that ‘hosts’, or ‘armies’ could also mean ‘multitudes’
or ‘worlds’, or ‘worlds’ within ‘worlds’, or

‘worlds’ beyond ‘worlds’ for that matter...

Again, from Mark 2:27^b-28

[*Jesus said,*]

*“The Sabbath was created for the sake of humanity
and not humanity for the sake of the Sabbath.*

*Therefore, the one who is the Son of Man – the true Heir of Humanity,
is also the Lord of the Sabbath,*

the day for remembering the multitudes of Creation.”

It makes sense then, that God – being God, would not *need* to rest,

but it also makes sense that God our compassionate Creator

would stop to reflect upon and admire all that had been created –
worlds within and worlds beyond.

This happy accident of mine seems to suggest an invitation

for us to do the same in our Sabbath-time,

to remember and celebrate the natural world in which we live.

Willard, p4

Church doctrine doesn't say much about our natural environment,
though in recent decades, Christians have looked for some connection
through the prayers of Francis of Assisi and Celtic Christian spirituality.
Our contact with Native American traditions has challenged and inspired us
as American Christians to have respect for the land, sea, and air.
We could do better – perhaps by looking and seeing
how the Sabbath was created for the sake of human-kind
and that the Sabbath is a day when we should remember
the multitudes of Creation.
So, those of you sitting by the windows, have that advantage...

Natural phenomena were helpful in getting human beings' attention
during the Exodus when God showed up on a mountaintop
in fire and dark clouds, speaking with a voice like thunder,
and warning that even animals were to be killed
for so much as touching Mt. Sinai.

However, by the time of Jesus and the first Christians,
we are assured about our place in a 'Kingdom' that
doesn't require fireworks and fear,
but rather thanksgiving for salvation inspired by forgiveness and healing.

Jesus was an observant Jew who attended synagogue on the Sabbath day,
but also taught his disciples and worshiped God under the sky
on mountainsides, at the seashore, in people's homes,
and even while just walking on roads.

He made these places sacred, by what he did wherever he was
in the company of people who came to listen to him or just be with him.
It was on a mountaintop and in his 'Sermon' on that 'Mount' that
he taught his disciples that they can pray and find God
by going into an empty room and shutting the door.

We have a God of intimacy and tenderness who
already knows what we need even before we ask,
because God knows us from the inside out, and can read us like a book.

We have a God who is still about celestial grandeur, quantum complexity,
and the inconceivable capacity to be present anywhere in a universe
that is still expanding, helping us to put into perspective
the politics and problems of this blue dot we call Planet Earth.

We have a God who walked among us as one of us –
unafraid, unashamed, and un-deflected from loving human beings
wherever we are on our life journey...

Willard, p.5

We can find God in those mystical convergences of spiritual insight
in the natural wonders of sunsets, starry nights, and sunrises,
alone or with others on mountaintops, at the beach,
on the road, on a boat, or on the golf course.

We can find God right here in this beautiful building where we have worshipped God
and fellowshiped together since we left Temple Shalom
on a sultry Sunday morning six years ago plus a week.

We can really appreciate all the wonders of Creation
especially as we remember we are sitting comfortably together
without having to faint from the heat, or freeze from the cold,
or get drenched by the rain, or be bit by fire-ants.

We can really appreciate not being distracted by the elements of Creation
as we listen to how people were helped by God through Christ long ago
and how God is still calling us to a hopeful future
and to help make it happen.

*[The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews said that]
... what cannot be shaken will last.*

*We should be grateful that we were given a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
And in this kingdom we please God by worshiping [God]
and by showing [God] great honor and respect. [Hebrews 12”27^b-28]*

So – at the very least, as you seek a Sabbath-time
to get away from the trials and tribulations, distractions and discomforts,
let this be the place you can come to and get away
to refresh and replenish yourself, and remember the multitudes
of blessings that still fill this world,
just as Jesus said in words to this effect...

*“The Sabbath was created for the sake of humanity
and not humanity for the Sabbath.*

*Therefore, the one who is the Son of Man – the true Heir of Humanity,
is also the Lord of the Sabbath,
the day for remembering the multitudes of Creation.”*

[Mark 2:27^b-28]

Amen

*Our lesson today from Hebrews 12:18-29,
describes the early Hebrews' encounter with God at Mt Sinai in the desert,
as a frightening experience.
However for the followers of Jesus, the 'kingdom' is experienced
more like a refuge sheltered by the power of God...*

- ¹⁸ You have not come to a place like Mount Sinai that can be seen and touched.
There is no flaming fire or dark cloud or storm ¹⁹ or trumpet sound.
The people of Israel heard a voice speak. But they begged it to stop,
²⁰ because they could not obey its commands.
They were even told to kill any animal that touched the mountain.
²¹ The sight was so frightening that Moses said he shook with fear.
- ²² You have now come to Mount Zion and to the heavenly Jerusalem.
This is the city of the living God,
where thousands and thousands of angels have come to celebrate.
- ²³ Here you will find all of God's dearest children,
whose names are written in heaven.
And you will find God himself, who judges everyone.
Here also are the spirits of those good people
who have been made perfect.
- ²⁴ And Jesus is here! He is the one who makes God's new agreement with us,
and his sprinkled blood says much better things than the blood of Abel.
- ²⁵ Make sure that you obey the one who speaks to you.
The people did not escape, when they refused to obey
the one who spoke to them at Mount Sinai.
Do you think you can possibly escape,
if you refuse to obey the one who speaks to you from heaven?
- ²⁶ When God spoke the first time, his voice shook only the earth.
This time he has promised to shake the earth once again, and heaven too.
- ²⁷ The words "once again" mean that
these created things will someday be shaken and removed.
Then what cannot be shaken will last.
- ²⁸ We should be grateful that we were given a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
And in this kingdom we please God by worshiping him
and by showing him great honor and respect.
- ²⁹ Our God is like a destructive fire!

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

Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

¹¹ And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years;
she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

¹² And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her,
“Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.”

¹³ And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight,
and she praised God.

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue,
indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people,
“There are six days on which work ought to be done;
come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him,
“You hypocrites!

Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger,
and lead it away to water it?

¹⁶ And ought not this woman,
a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years,
be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”

¹⁷ As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame;
and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.