

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Mark 2:23-3:6

Institutional Life or Godly Life?

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God created Sabbath. Through Sabbath God's character is revealed. God cares for us, desires wholeness, rest, full and rich lives. Jesus' actions exemplify God's character.

As we begin this sermon time this morning, I'd invite you to take several deep breaths. Get centered in this space. Fill your lungs with breath. Slow down. We are talking about Sabbath today. God created Sabbath rest for all of creation. The word Sabbath means a day set aside for rest and worship. Jews keep the Sabbath from sundown on Friday evening to sundown on Saturday evening. They do it because God commands it – which we'll get to in just a moment. But for now, knowing that we're going to be talking about rest and wholeness and life, take several deep slow breaths. Slow down.

Remember the story of creation? God created the earth, sky, seas, birds, cows, dogs, humans, beetles, everything. Then what did God do on the seventh day? God rested. Yes. "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." (Gen 2:2-3)

Now, God commanded in the 10 Commandments: "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you."

Observe the Sabbath day – the Sabbath day comes every week. Friday night to Saturday night. This day, the Sabbath day was intended by God to be a different kind of day. No cooking. No cleaning. Why? God cared for God's people and wanted them to rest, like God had rested on the seventh day. Think about that. If God rested, and humankind is created in God's image, then humans need to rest. Every week. One day in that week is created by God for us to be rest.

Secondly, how do we observe that Sabbath day? The Lord God says, "Keep it holy." Worship. Honor and love and praise God who created all days and this particular day, of rest. Don't work. Worship. Remember the Commandment? Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Thirdly, is Sabbath just for humans? No. It is for all of creation and all peoples. Everyone gets to participate in Sabbath. Those who had been slaves in Egypt, the people of Israel; they knew hard labor. They understood being forced to work and not rest. So they needed rest. The animals need rest. The refugees and immigrants - those not living in their home countries need

rest. God created Sabbath for the people of Israel and those outside of Israel. Stop. Worship God. Pray. Rest.

So that's what the ancient Israelites did. And eventually, the countries around them began to notice. "What, you cannot trade with me on Sunday? Why? You must go to temple? Why? You can do that any day of the week. You don't slaughter your animals on Sunday. Why not?" Other cultures didn't stop to worship, pray and rest. This particular practice of keeping Sabbath was characteristically Jewish. To be Jewish was to keep Sabbath. It was part and parcel of their God given identity.

Why Sabbath? Because God cares for God's people. It wasn't an arbitrary command. The natural consequence of keeping Sabbath, meant that people's lives were centered on God and the scriptural laws and codes. God desired for them a full, blessed life – within and with God. So to keep Sabbath was to know God. Remember God and the blessings that come from God. Work. Worship. Honor God. Keep the Laws and life will go well. God will bless us. They understood obedience which in turn brought forth joy in living as God intended.

Many of you (with more white hair than some of us) will remember when this country had Blue Laws. On Sundays, stores were closed. You couldn't shop, or go to entertainment. These laws were designed to enforce Sabbath, religious standards. On Sunday mornings, you could count on your neighbor's garage doors going up at the same time yours did. They were going to church like you were.

That's not the case anymore is it? We live in a culture where productivity is paramount. It's about performance. Income. Consumerism. Go. Go. Go. Why would stores be closed on Sunday? They would lose income! Money drives ethics of business as they decide their shopping hours. Money and convenience drives our morals which make it easy to say, "I'll go shop on Sunday." So we don't stop. If you stop, you'll get left behind. If you stop you lose pay. If you rest, your dead grandfather, who has been gone for 40 years now will rise up and remind you that you don't work hard enough! "Just pull up your boot straps, man!"

Consumerism and productivity are our laws. They're not blue. They're green. Dollar bill green. And many of us have acquiesced and often without thinking about it, gone right along with them. That has become our God. Keeping Sabbath has gone by the wayside.

For the Pharisees, it wasn't money that drove them, it was God's Law itself. So fast forward to Jesus and his disciples. They are walking through the fields on the Sabbath and basically getting a snack. The disciples are picking grains to eat.

Then Jesus goes into the synagogue. The Pharisees are watching him to see what he'll do. Will Jesus willfully disregard God's law? Jesus proceeds to heal a man's withered hand. Crisis!

Except...the way Mark tells the story, Jesus hasn't done anything to break Sabbath. He has done nothing which constitutes 'work' the way Sabbath prohibits. Jesus is broadening the

letter of the law to include the spirit of the law. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or harm, to save life or to kill?" By bringing about the healing of the man, Jesus is fulfilling the law which is to honor life. The Sabbath was created by God for healing. Wholeness. Rest. Restoration.

The Pharisees are rightfully angry. They follow God's Law, because it is their belief, if the Law isn't followed, God will not come. The Jews have lived under oppression for years. They long for God to come and save them. Furthermore Jesus is this upstart who is saying He is God and now teaching the people to break Sabbath and who knows what else! How will God's people keep Sabbath if Jesus and his disciples' don't? How will God's people continue to be separate and demonstrate God's identity for them, if they don't follow all of God's law?

Fast forward to 2018. Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby. Two stores who are closed on Sundays. On the Chick-fil-A website it explains why: our founder saw the importance of closing on Sundays so that he and his employees could set aside one day to rest and worship if they choose. On the video that you can view, they state being closed on Sundays is about how 'you choose to spend the time.' (www.chick-fil-a.com/About/Who-We-Are)

On the Hobby Lobby website, I found this: We are committed to Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with Biblical principles. (<https://www.hobbylobby.com/about-us/our-story>)

Today, in a culture that lives by productivity, Chick Fil-a and Hobby Lobby take a stand. They have created an identity that says, "We support Sabbath rest. We want our employees to have a day to spend with their families. To worship."

One of our own members, Cathy Simmering, practices Sabbath. She learned quite a bit about the Jewish practice of Shabbat from friends in Ft. Collins. Cathy cooks her food for the next day so she doesn't have to cook on Sunday. She comes to worship and has her own prayer time. She lights the candles on Friday night to signal the beginning of Sabbath. When her clients call on Sundays with a question, she tells them, "I'm not working today."

You see? Keeping Sabbath is about so much more than simply going to worship. Especially now, keeping Sabbath is very counter cultural. It isn't what most people do. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or harm, to save life or to kill?"

Remember the movie Chariots of Fire? Eric Liddel on the British Olympics team, refuses to run his race because it lands on a Sunday. Despite intense pressure from the Prince of Wales and the British Olympic Committee, Eric stands on his conviction. "I will not run on the Sabbath." He knew his identity as God's child and wouldn't forsake the commandment for day of rest. He didn't want to sin nor did he want to lead anyone else to sin.

Sabbath is a lifestyle. It's more than simply going to worship. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or harm, to save life or to kill?" As we seek more Sabbath in our busy lives, what if we

began to ask the question Jesus did? Is what I do on Sabbath life giving? Does it bring harm to myself or others? Remembering at the same time that God created it because God cares for all of humanity and creation.

It is about God who grounded all of creation in a practice of rest. Who then instituted that rest after God's people had been enslaved. God doesn't desire for us to be enslaved to other gods; the god of production, the god of false identity, the gods of hurried time. God longs for us to honor and worship God through ceasing to produce, produce, produce. God longs for us to remember we have an identity as children of God. God longs for us to stop, be still, feel the breath of God's own life within our own and know Sabbath.

It's Sunday...how will we, how will you spend your time?

Amen