

2nd Sunday after Pentecost
June 2, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 2:23-3:6

Mark 2:23-3:6 (EHV)

Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. ²⁴The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

²⁵He replied to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)? ²⁶He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions.”

²⁷Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath.”

³Jesus entered the synagogue again, and a man was there with a withered hand. ²They were watching Jesus closely to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath day, so that they could accuse him. ³He said to the man with the withered hand, “Step forward! ⁴Then he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵Then he looked around at them with anger, deeply grieved at the hardness of their hearts. He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶The Pharisees left and immediately began to conspire against Jesus with the Herodians, plotting how they might kill him.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The image on the front of the service folder says, “A Top-down Faith.” Today and in the next weeks, we will consider truths that can only be revealed to us from God. We would never arrive at these truths on our own, but instead, sinful mankind usually arrives at the opposite of what God intends. The readings before us this morning give us an example of this top-down faith in the topic of the Sabbath.

Remember that the Sabbath Day goes all the way back to the beginning. God rested on the seventh day after creating all things in six days. God was establishing a day of rest before sin even entered the world. Rest was good before the thorns and thistles and sweat of our brow hard work became the normal way to survive in a world under the curse of sin. Thousands of years after the first Sabbath day, the Lord inscribed the Sabbath into stone on Mt Siani. It was now what we label the 3rd Commandment. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. God explained in his Word that the seventh day, Saturday, was to be a day of rest for everyone. No one was to go about their normal work on that day. Don’t go to work in the fields. Don’t build in your carpentry shop. Don’t open your booth at the market. Instead, rest your body and gather with other believers for the sacred assembly to hear God’s Word. The Sabbath commandment was given to bless the people of God with rest for body and soul.

About 1,500 years have passed from the time of Moses to the Sabbath day when Jesus is walking with his disciples by a field in Mark 2. Sinful humans tend to drift from God’s commandments over time one way or another. On one side, we ignore the commandment, thinking that we know better than God what to do with the days of the week. On the other hand, we try to improve the commandment to make it what we think it should really be about. That is what we see in Mark 2 & 3 today. The Pharisees especially took God’s Word and law seriously. They wanted to make sure they and everyone else was doing exactly what God commanded. So, they added guidelines and interpretations and extra rules to the 3rd Commandment to make it “better.”

They had a checklist of actions that were acceptable or unacceptable on the Sabbath. When Pharisees see the disciples harvesting grain on the Sabbath, they know the disciples and therefore Jesus as well, are terrible sinners. They are working on the Sabbath! When Jesus heals the hand of the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath, they know Jesus is a Sabbath breaker. He is working on the Sabbath! Of course, the Pharisees are completely wrong. In Deuteronomy (23:24-25), God specifically allowed travelers to pick grapes or grain from fields as they walked by. And Jesus did not actually do any work. He told the man to stretch out his hand which was certainly not against any Sabbath law, God's or man's. But the Pharisees really wanted to find fault with others, especially with Jesus. They never could.

Since I'm speaking to a group of believers who have gathered for worship on Sunday morning, I want to expose the little Pharisee in each of us. There is a part of us that likes to find fault in others. As Christians, we can especially do this in regard to the Sabbath day. Maybe you have a checklist of those who participate in forbidden activities on the Sabbath. The neighbor who mows the lawn on Sunday. Those at the baseball or softball diamonds on Sunday mornings. Those in the campgrounds on the weekends. Those who pick up an extra shift at work on Sunday. Those who don't dress up to your standards at church. Those who fall asleep in church. Those who can't keep their kids in line on Sundays. Oh, we can have quite a list of Sabbath breakers and that can make us feel pretty good about the way we keep the 3rd Commandment by keeping it holy in the ways we have chosen.

That kind of legalism completely misses the point of the Sabbath. Paul tells us in Colossians that we are not to be judged by Sabbath days since Christ has fulfilled the Sabbath. No longer is Saturday the only day set aside for rest from God. Sunday is often the day Christians do so today, but we are not to judge those who choose a different day. The Sabbath today is not about a day of the week but the attitude of our heart.

Therefore, the Sabbath is not a day to take away your joy and rest but for God to give you joy and rest in Christ. God wants us to gather with fellow believers on a regular basis, not to earn his favor, not to avoid punishment, not even to make God happy. Instead, he wants us to receive his rest through repentance and forgiveness because it is good for us now and forever. He wants us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ because it is good for us now and forever. The Sabbath command is summed up by Luther wonderfully, "to gladly hear and learn God's Word." It is an attitude more than an action. Of course, hearing and learning will often take place together at a church service, normally on Sunday mornings.

So, what do we say to those who do not regularly gather with us on Sunday mornings? We could tell them that God is upset with them for skipping church. We could tell them that if they don't show up at least once a month, they are not a very good Christian. We could tell them that they have to be in church to keep the 3rd Commandment and make God happy. We could tell them that man was made for the Sabbath, but of course, we would be directly contradicting Jesus. Christ said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*"

This is the part our sinful minds would never get on our own. Only Jesus Christ can reveal this amazing truth to us. God did not give this Commandment to get something from man but to give something to man. Humans were not put on this planet in order for God to have someone to keep the Sabbath command. The Sabbath command was given to bless humans with rest for body and soul. The Sabbath is for our good, for our benefit. So, what do we say to ourselves or to another believer who has been missing the gathering of the saints on Sundays?

We invite them to get some rest. For the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to forgive sins, giving rest for our souls. Jesus promises to be where two or three are gathered in his name, around his Word. Christ is the one whom the religious and secular leaders plotted together on a Sabbath day to kill and would eventually carry it out on a Friday. He is the one who fulfilled the

Sabbath, even resting in his grave on Saturday before rising from the dead on a Sunday. Christ has paid for every sin and promises to give rest to all the weary and oppressed whom come to him. In this place, weary sinners receive the full forgiveness of sins in Holy Communion. In this place, we are reminded of our baptisms, when the Holy Spirit brought us into the family of God. In this place, the Lord God gives us rest for our souls now and the promise of eternal rest in heaven.

When a new store is about to open, do they invite the public to come and clean the store, stock shelves, put up posters, take inventory and so on? Of course not. The employees take care of all of that. Instead, the store does give aways, special deals, coupons, and more so that people want to show up at the store again and again. I'm not suggesting that we adopt a consumer driven mindset for our congregation and provide coupons and entertainment to get people in the doors. But for ourselves and for others, continually examine our attitudes towards the gathering of believers, normally on Sundays. Sometimes our thinking is: "I have to get up and I have to go to church, and I have to get this done at church and I have to do that too." But you were not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for you. "I get to go to church and hear the good news that Jesus has forgiven me. I get to go to church and hear the Word through which the Holy Spirit strengthens me. I get to go to church and be encouraged by other believers to stay in the one, true faith. I get to go to church and receive the many spiritual gifts God promises to give through his Word and Sacraments." And when you are talking with someone who has not been in church for some time or maybe never been, "God would like to give you gifts too. Would you like to go with me?"

Amen.