



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN!**

Many of you have heard my suggestion for returning the world to a more amicable society. That is to turn off the internet on Sunday. The only thing you could do to on Sunday morning was to go to worship. Darn. . . . And what better way to spend a Sunday morning. And after worship go to grandmas for a home cooked meal. No cell phone, iPads, or even TV. Just pure conversation with others in the same room. Imagine playing board games with your family and having no interruptions. That is how my life was growing up. Remember, you could not even buy a gallon of milk on Sunday. Stores were closed and on a rare occasion, in the evening maybe, you could find a movie theatre open or a restaurant or two that were serving. Most things in our society today would not work without the internet. Even the cash registers at stores would lay quiet. And our thumbs would get a rest from texting. And communicating face to face might be a challenge for some.

Well, our Gospel story for today is about the Sabbath. What does Sabbath mean to you? In our dictionary, that I have handy online, says, “any special day of worship, prayer or rest”. And the next definition was, “a day or other period of rest or break from certain forms of activity”. And then it went on to say, “*If people gave themselves a weekly sabbath from electronic devices, it would probably cure many ills.*” Interesting that dictionary.com would make such a statement?

Our third commandment that Moses brought down off the mountain is *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* And Luther gave us his thought on Sabbath in the Small Catechism as he wrote for parents to teach their children from. “We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” According to Luther, God’s Word is a treasure, and we should ponder it, use it, and proclaim it’s power. God’s word awakens new understanding, pleasure and devotion and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. God’s Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living. An awesome gift from our God.

So as Christians what is our Sabbath day? The Scribes and Pharisees believed that working on the Sabbath, Saturday, was only allowed to sustain life. No other work should be performed. An

example I read this week was about a building collapse. If it happened on the Sabbath, it would be allowed to rescue victims if they were alive, but the dead would remain until the Sabbath was over. Jesus in verse 27 said that the Sabbath is made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath. And Jesus himself is lord of the Sabbath.

Sometimes it seems that the Pharisees were more interested in keeping laws than in honoring God. The prohibition of work on the Sabbath, the seventh day, as God rested after creation, had 39 different rules that the Scribes attached as descriptors of "work". This group of rules was found in the writing called the Mishnah. And too often the Scribes lifted its importance above that of the Torah. These laws or rules became so entangled with God's law that it was often hard for the people to tell them apart. In other words, the rules became more important than what the original law was intended for. And so, the religious leaders laid in wait for Jesus to break one of the many laws of the Sabbath by plucking grain to eat and healing a man's withered hand.

So how do we find meaning in the command by God to honor the Sabbath and make it holy. Well, first of all, we designate Sunday as our Sabbath, the first day of the week. That is the day that Jesus ascended to heaven. I am sure you have heard before that each Sunday is a mini-Easter. And that is where our Sabbath begins on Resurrection day, Sunday. And what do you suppose we are to do on that day? Well, my answer would obviously we gather for worship. Sabbath was made for humankind. It is a day that was set aside for hearing God's word. And I know that I am preaching to the choir today since you are all here. But it is an important, maybe the most important thing we do together as Christians here at CTS. We worship God together and it is from this hour that we are sent out into the world to make disciples for Jesus.

One of my favorite stories is about a mother who called to her son on Sunday morning and said, "Son, it is time to get up. This is Sunday morning; church begins in an hour and a half. I'm fixing your breakfast." The son just murmured, put the pillow around his head and went back to sleep. She called him again, "Your breakfast is ready, and it is an hour until church." He murmured again and rolled over and went back to sleep. She spoke a third time saying, "It is only 45 minutes to church time. It is time to get up. Your breakfast is cold." Finally, she came up to his room and said, "Son! It is time for you to get up. You have to get up now and get dressed to get to church on time." He grumbled, "Why do I have to go to church? The people aren't friendly. The music is terrible. The sermons are dull. I can't stand it." She said to him. "you know why you have to go. You are 40 years old, and you are the preacher."

Whether you are the preacher or not, you have to decide on what you are going to do on the first day of the week. There are many choices today. Yes, you could stay home in bed. You could travel to visit a friend or relative. You could take a drive to enjoy God's creation. Or you could go to a sporting event. Sunday is the premier day of the week for the NFL. And of course, there is always boating and fishing. Or how about shopping. Dining out, taking in a movie or golfing are other options. So, what do you choose to do on Sundays? What do you think is lawful to do on the Sabbath? We know what Jesus did. He ate grain he picked and then he healed a man. Those seem outside of our purview as modern-day Christians.

Do we insist that everyone observe the Christian Sabbath? Should we mount a campaign against the stores for being open on Sunday? Should we stay out of stores, restaurants as they cause someone else to work on the Sabbath? Should we refuse to participate in recreational activities on Sundays? Would that mean not going to a Packer game or worse yet, not watching a Brewer's game.

Or should we preach against members who miss worship on Sundays for family reasons? Sounds a bit legalistic doesn't it. In fact, that is exactly what Jesus was protesting by plucking grain and healing on the Sabbath. And we surely don't want to become like the Pharisees! More concerned about keeping the law than loving God.

You probably have also heard me say that I am not about the numbers in the pews on Sunday morning, but rather I feel my call is to make disciples for Jesus. And as disciples we know that we cannot earn our way to heaven by the number of times we come to worship on Sunday morning. Nor are we going to go to hell for not attending. We walk the line somewhere between legalism and absenteeism. I would be a busy pastor if I visited every single person on our roster that does not attend church each week. Even my Sabbath would be caught up in doing the work of the Lord? Right???

An unknown author tells the story of a member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, but stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail." Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

And as Jesus said, the Sabbath was a day made for man. On our Sabbath, our day of worship we come to this place where forgiveness flows freely. We come to this place where we confessed brokenness and sinfulness and are changed by the Cross of Jesus into righteousness before God. We come to this place where the Resurrected Savior offers hope to us, the sinners. We come to hear the Word of the Lord and to eat the finest meal He has given for us. We are filled here by God so that we can honor Him and glorify Him with our lives.

I would like to close with a story from Daily Bread in the 1990's. Franz Joseph Haydn, the renown composer was present at the Vienna Music Hall. His oratorio, The Creation, was being performed. But he was an old man now. He was weak and unable to move around easily so the great composer was confined to a wheelchair. As the majestic work he wrote moved along, the audience was caught up with tremendous emotion. When the passage, "And there was light!" was reached, the chorus and orchestra burst forth in such power that the crowd could no longer restrain its enthusiasm. The vast assembly rose in spontaneous applause. But Haydn struggled to stand and motioned for silence. With his frail hand, he pointed toward heaven, and he said, "no, no, not me, but from thence comes all!" Having given the glory and praise to the Creator, he fell back into his chair exhausted.

Folks, worship is about doing the same with our lives. **AMEN**