

Proper 4 B
St. Mark 2:23-3:6
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St. George's Episcopal Church
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Sabbath

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

The Sabbath. To many Christians this infers spending part of a day in church. That is a good use of sabbath time. To those of us who are clergy, the term was often used to refer to our “day off” and these came to be known as sabbaths or sabbath days for clergy.

What is a sabbath? It is a time or a day of rest, where we are to avoid working and pursue restful things and pursuits. It is often very difficult to tell a hard working person to slow down, stop working, and do no more work. Sabbath time is antithetical to the current American culture of busyness. The busier we are, the better and more productive we are and the more valuable in the wider community. It is sort of like driving a car well beyond the time to change the oil and hoping against hope it will run well and not break down. However, the signs of wear on human beings who live sabbathless are more apparent as life progresses.

Jesus teaches that the sabbath was made for us, not as some rule imposed upon us to obey from on high, albeit somewhat grudgingly. The spirit of criticism surrounding the observation of sabbath-time even in our own times, is not dissimilar from that of Jesus. ‘How dare you do this or that on the sabbath and violate the commandment?’ The commandment was for us to take and observe a time of rest. The sabbath was made for us, not us for the sabbath observance.

Rest is certainly restorative physically, we all get that, but it is also a time to be restored in spirit and mind as well as the body. The latter are often lost in the common parlance.

The old proverb, which dates back to at least 1659, says, “All work and no play make Jack a dull boy.” The proverb means that without time off from work, a person becomes both bored and boring, according to Wikipedia. Not only does it make you dull, it physically dulls your body—like an overused knife. We physically wear ourselves out from overwork, without taking a break to properly rest up. We lose our sharpness and become dull with overwork.

Would you really enjoy a vacation that someone else designed for you, without any input from you? Probably not as much as one which you shaped for yourself. The sabbath was made for you, not you for the sabbath. Jesus is trying to correct our misassumptions about the law and the sabbath by changing our view of them, by turning them around and seeing them in a different light. The problem Jesus had was with the legalism that had evolved around the sabbath keeping. People had lost sight of the forest for the trees!

Jesus lived a busy and stress filled ministry, full of the demands of others, yet he sought time when he needed it to rest, regroup and reflect, and to spiritually recharge and re-ground himself: “And after He had dismissed the crowds, He went up the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone...”

“He withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted lonely place by Himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed Him on foot from the towns.”

Scholars debate the length of Jesus’ ministry. Some say it was one year, others that it was 3 years. The Gospels do not tell us this detail. Either way, God had a very limited amount of time to accomplish what God set out to do. But even with this priority and press of important business, Jesus honored the need for sabbath time. Others around him did not honor his need, as evidenced by the comment about the crowds who followed him to the lonely place from all the surrounding towns. Does your family honor your sabbath? Your friends? Sometimes we all need to go away to a quiet place to rest. And the more we do, the better our lives will be.

Blue Laws in Connecticut

It used to be that everything was closed on Sunday except pharmacies, delicatessens and restaurants. You could not do business on Sunday. You could not work in the office. Now it is a major shopping day like any other. Even Thanksgiving is being turned into “black Thursday” despite the efforts of some retailers with a conscience who care about their employees. When do workers get to rest? Indeed, when do shoppers get to rest?

In New York City, of all places, the sabbath time is mandated by ordinance. New York City businesses must close one day a week, it doesn’t matter when, but they must take a day of rest. Hence Broadway, many restaurants and museums are closed Mondays and you will find many package stores close on Wednesdays. Of all places, in the city that never sleeps, they have learned how to observe sabbath and rest.

So what can we do to keep the sabbath?

- Stop doing things. You are not what you do, you are what you be.
- Intentionally set aside sabbath time regularly in your weekly schedule. God worked six days creating the world, so it says in Genesis, and then on the seventh day God rested and took a sabbath.
- Ask your family, friends, and those with whom you work to help you keep your sabbath holy and whole.
- Sleep and Rest- imagine we need to be told to do this?
- Meditation and mindfulness can help you spiritually rest.
- Pray- the real prayer- not lists of things you want or are concerned about, but simply being in the presence of God. Being quiet in God’s presence. Listening to God.
- No listening to our own stress, concerns, worries. No making lists. Let them go and let God.
- Remember- the sabbath is for you. It is your special time. AMEN