

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity (2022)

Keeping the Sabbath Holy

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“One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away.” (Luke 14:1–4, ESV)

In the Gospel Reading for today, St. Luke places our Lord Jesus in the home of a Pharisee, on the Sabbath. The Sabbath, that most holy day, that one day of the week on which the Jews were to set aside as a day of rest, a day on which the Jews were to worship God in assembly, either in the synagogue or in the temple, a day on which they were forbidden to do work of any kind. But lo and behold, in the presence of the Pharisee and his friends, Jesus heals a man with dropsy. This was a work according to the Jews. Now in witnessing this, this Pharisee, and his Jewish guests, could have cried out, blasphemy. But they didn't. They didn't cry out condemning our Lord's action. But in their hearts, they had condemned Jesus for His act of mercy on the Sabbath. In their hearts our Lord had violated the prohibition against working on the Sabbath, and as we heard, our Lord Jesus corrected their error; doing works of mercy on the Sabbath was not a violation of God's Law.

In their condemnation of Jesus, the Jews had misused God's purpose for the Sabbath, turning the Sabbath into a work of Law rather than an opportunity to hear and receive the blessings of the Gospel. God had declared the seventh day, the day He rested from His work of Creation to be a solemn day for His people, a day in which He invited them to rest, to hear and reflect on His Word, a day on which He chose to fulfill His desire to come into their presence, to serve them sacramentally, pouring out His forgiveness upon them, while receiving from them their sacrifices.

Today, Christians no longer observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, but instead, on the first day of the week. Christians chose this day of the week because it was the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Now some would have you believe that in worshiping on the first day of the week, Christians are disobeying God's Third Commandment to ***“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8, ESV)*** and thereby defiling the Sabbath. But in saying this, it simply shows that they do not understand that Christians chose the first day of the week because this is the day of our Lord's resurrection, that day which brought to completion the OT laws while also bringing in a new creation.

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians, wrote, ***“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:16–17, ESV)*** Furthermore, St. Luke records the new worship practice of the early, first-century Christians in his book of Acts, writing, ***“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.” (Acts 20:7, ESV)*** So, Christians set aside the first day of the week to observe the Sabbath, thereby following God's Third Commandment to ***“Remember***

the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” On that day we reverently acknowledge our Creator in fear, and love, gladly hearing preaching and His Word, not despising it but holding it sacred and gladly and learning it. (LSC, Third Commandment) On that day, we come before God to receive His sacramental gifts, especially the forgiveness of our sins. But sadly, too many who call themselves Christian don’t understand this meaning or honor it.

God set aside the Sabbath day not so that we could serve Him, but so that He could serve us. Jesus said, **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** (Mark 2:27, *ESV*) All too often people believe that by coming to church on the Sabbath, on Sunday, they are rendering service to God rather than being served by Him. They come to Church with the attitude of fulfilling an obligation, that obligation of bringing their offerings and their praise before God that they may appease Him. However, such an attitude fails to understand the true meaning of the Third Commandment: God wants men to observe the Sabbath so He can serve them. This is the focus of Jesus’ invitation, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28, *ESV*) Come to Me you who are troubled and persecuted by your sins. Come to Me you who seek righteousness and the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10), I will pardon you, I will pour out My forgiveness upon you, I will give you peace, and I will call you blessed. This is the purpose of worshipping on the Sabbath, for on the Sabbath we gather where God can be found, where the presence of Christ comes to us that He may serve us by His Means of Grace: Word, and Sacrament ministry.

Therefore, we Christians gladly gather to hear God’s Word, setting aside time for worship on Sunday morning, the day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Sitting in His presence we hear His Word and receive His Sacraments, worshipping sacramentally and sacrificially, recalling the wonders of our Triune God, observing the seasons and holy days of the Church Year, but most importantly, receiving what God so desires to give us: His forgiveness.

Thus, at the beginning of our observance of the Sabbath in Divine Service, at the Invocation, we pronounce in whose presence we are, we are in the presence of the Triune God: Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover, in this blessed invocation we also confess who we are, children of the Triune God, having been adopted through the blessed waters of Baptism.

Laying our sins before God, we kneel and confess our sins to God our Father, pouring out our grievous and mortal sins before Him, seeking His favor, His forgiveness, then hearing, through the voice of the pastor, our Lord’s blessed words of forgiveness: “I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” There is no more blessed moment in life than knowing you have received God’s mercy, that you are a forgiven child of His. With those words of absolution, God has pronounced you righteous in His sight and worthy of the blessings of His Son’s crucifixion: forgiveness and life eternal.

Having received God’s forgiveness, we petition His mercy, not just for us but for the whole world and for the Church, in the words of the Kyrie, *“Lord have mercy,”* one of the oldest prayers in the Christian Church. Having sought His mercy, we turn to sing His praises, with the words of God’s people, (the angelic hymn in Luke 2:14) who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, *“Glory to God in the Highest and peace to His people on earth.”* Look at the flow here, we receive from God what we so cherish, His forgiveness and then sing back to Him how wonderful is His mercy and His glory above all things.

Forgiveness granted we are held spellbound as we hear His inspired word of Holy Scripture read in our presence. Reminding us that our roots as Christians are found in God’s OT people, we listen to the Old Testament Reading for the day. That lesson which usually runs parallel to the Gospel Reading connecting the old to the new. We remain focused listening to the letters of

St. Paul, St. Peter, and others in the Epistle Reading. Those Epistles, those letters written to the newly founded churches of Jesus Christ in the first century of the Christian Church. Then we stand in reverence and honor of Christ, signing Alleluia's looking forward to hearing the blessed Gospel Reading. Christ speaking to us through His inspired Word. In each of these readings we are awed as we hear God speak to us through His Word, as He reveals Himself and His Son to us in this age that we may hold fast to the age to come when we will no longer hear Him speak to us through the voice of His servant, the pastor, but we shall hear Him speak to us face-to-face.

After the readings we hear God's Word spoken to us through the sermon. In the sermon through the proclamation of the Law, the pastor explains God's wrath against those who would turn a blind eye to God and His Word, warning them of eternal destruction, and he also proclaims God's mercy and love for all who hear God's Word of the Gospel, that word which reveals God's Son Jesus Christ and His meritorious work of redemption for all mankind through His life, death, and resurrection. That word through which men are brought to faith to believe in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Altar of the Cross, that sacrifice which absorbed the wrath of God that is rightfully ours, that sacrifice which paid the full penalty for our sins, that sacrifice which justified mankind before God and opened His heart to grant His forgiveness. The sermon opens our hearts to rightly reflect on the Word of God which tells us what His Son Jesus has done for us, overcoming the consequence of our sins by His holy death upon the Altar of the Cross. This Good News truly allows us to set our troubles aside and rest on the Sabbath. But we don't stop there, we don't stop worshiping and proclaiming God with the end of the sermon. No, now we make a public confession of who we are, children of God, people saved by His grace and mercy through the meritorious death of God's only begotten Son.

In the Creed, we confess that we believe in God the Father, who is the Creator of all things. We believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, who is our Lord. Who has delivered us from sin, death, and the devil not by gold or silver but by His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Moreover, we confess that we are unable to come to true faith in Christ Jesus by our own reason or strength, but that the Holy Spirit has called us through the Gospel and enlightened and sanctified us to believe in Christ Jesus and His forgiveness won for us on the cross. Furthermore, we confess as forgiven members of the body of Christ and saints of the holy Christian Church, after our death a day will come when we will be resurrected to live with Jesus for all eternity in heaven. Thus, by the Creed we acknowledge the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as our Lord and our God, thereby fulfilling the First Commandment.

In this Divine Service we see God's plan for worship, His offering us His sacramental gifts and we giving Him our sacrifices. Up to this point in this holy service we have received God's sacramental gift of absolution and He has sacramentally spoken to us through His Word. We heard Him speak to us in the Readings and in the sermon. In turn we have offered Him our sacrificial offerings of petition and prayer, hymns and collects, offerings and confession. All this culminates in that part of the Divine Service, which is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind, His great sacramental gift of His Son's body and blood in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. After extoling the merit and grace of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in the words of the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, and after having consecrated the elements, we approach the altar rail in lowly reverence, kneeling at the rail, kneeling in the very presence of Christ, to receive from Him, His true body and blood which He gave on the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Here, at the altar rail we are reminded of His agonizing sacrifice to complete His mission on earth, to give His life for ours, to give His life for the forgiveness of our sins. We kneel in holy reverence, in thanksgiving for this most blessed of gifts for the forgiveness of our sins and the

strengthening of our faith. This is true worship on the Sabbath, receiving from God what He desires to give us, His forgiveness through His blessed and holy Son, Jesus Christ.

Having worshiped with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven: the apostles, the prophets, the patriarchs, and all the saints who have gone before us, we complete the service by our sacrificial offerings of continued prayer and hymns, receiving at the end the sacramental blessing of God's Benediction. Thus, I ask you, could there be a better way to remember the Sabbath Day? I don't think so.

But sadly, there are so many who do not know this type of worship, this blessed observance of the Sabbath. We pray that God would open their eyes, their ears, and their hearts to see, listen, and rightly understand this ancient form of Christian understanding regarding *Keeping the Sabbath Day*, of coming together to be in the very presence of Christ, to receive His sacramental blessings, while offering true reverence in sacrificial response. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.