

“SABBATH”

**Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Mark 2:23 – 3:6
June 3, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

INTRODUCTION:

**The little town I grew up in,
was held captive for many years by “blue laws.”**

**In case you don’t know about “blue laws,”
they are laws that are specifically designed to severely restrict
or outright ban some or all Sunday activities –
- such as retail sales - for religious reasons.**

**These laws were handed down from the Puritans in the Northeast,
adopted in our town by the local Baptist Church
and Church of Christ-
- who for the first time in the history of the town
had agreed on ANYTHING!**

**What that translated to for the rest of us was
you couldn’t buy anything in our town
between Saturday night and Monday morning.**

**And any kid that planned to do any hunting or fishing on Sunday,
had to be pretty sneaky about it.**

**Those laws have pretty much gone by the wayside.
But what lingers behind is the question:
What activities are appropriate on Sundays?**

THE LAW:

The law stated in Deuteronomy is:

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

To the orthodox Jew,

that means on the Sabbath – Saturday for them –
- activities are severely restricted.

Food must be prepared before the Sabbath
because preparing and cooking food
is considered work and therefore is forbidden.

Travel is also severely restricted.

Orthodox Jews are not allowed to travel
outside the boundaries of their own neighborhoods.

This begs the question:

Is this what God had in mind when God made the commandment?
Or did God mean something a little less restrictive?

I’ll come back to that question in a minute.

JESUS AND THE LAW:

Then along comes Jesus – God incarnate.

And I mean “along came Jesus” literally.

**Mark records two separate incidents
in which Jesus fails to keep the law of the Sabbath.**

**In the first instance, on a Sabbath,
Jesus and His disciples walk through a field of grain.
Since they were hungry, they picked some grain to eat.**

**Unfortunately, there were Pharisees watching this happen.
Isn't that the way it always is?
There seems to be a pharisee in every church
that lurks in the shadows
watching for someone to break the rules.**

**The Pharisees quickly point out
that Jesus and His followers are breaking the law of Sabbath.
What they are doing is not allowed!
Shame be upon them!**

**Jesus gently points out that David once broke the Law
in order to feed some folks that were hungry.
He gave them bread that was reserved only for priests.**

**Jesus then said to them:
“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”**

**In the second incident,
Jesus went is in a synagogue
along with a man with a shriveled hand.**

**The Pharisees were there and on guard –
- watching to see if Jesus would break the law of Sabbath.**

**It was a trap, of course.
The Pharisees were looking for Jesus to disobey the law.**

**Being aware of the looming and hovering Pharisees,
Jesus had the man stand up before everyone**

**The Jesus said to everyone –
- *especially* the Pharisees –
- and posed this question:
“Which is lawful on the Sabbath:
to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”**

**Having been exposed,
the Pharisees remained silent.**

**So, being angry and disappointed,
and to prove His point, Jesus said to the man:
“Stretch out your hand.”**

**And as quick as that, the man was healed.
And the Pharisees retreated to plot the death of Jesus.**

So, here we have this strange dichotomy:

**On the one hand, we have the Law
that says to keep the Sabbath holy –
- seems to prohibit the doing of any work.**

**On the other hand, we have Jesus saying:
“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”**

PUTTING THE SABBATH INTO PERSPECTIVE:

**To fully understand the dichotomy
of what Jesus was saying about the law,
we must start with God's intention for the Law;
especially the Law of the Sabbath.**

**Luther believed – and taught – the whole purpose of the Law
was to terrorize us and drive us towards God.**

**Luther said the Gospel, on the other hand,
was to lure us, to invite us, to comfort us.**

**That sounds way too much like the stick and carrot method for me.
You either get the stick or the carrot.**

That does not sound like a loving God at all!

**I believe the commandment to rest on the Sabbath
had two principle meanings and applications.**

**The first application has to do with health and physical rest.
It is not healthy to work 7 days a week without a break.
Not only does the body begin breaking down,
but it is taxing to our mental health.**

Ever hear the old adage:

“All work and no play make Johnny a dull boy?”

Well, the modern version of that would be:

**“All work and no play make Johnny a real grouch,
hard to live with, and prone to fits of anger and depression.”**

**Requiring those who work for you
to work 7 days a week without a break is even worse.
That includes animals as well as people.**

**In other words,
God is instructing us to set aside time for physical rest –
- as day to rejuvenate.**

But I do not believe it is to be idle time.

Is it work to take your family boating on Sunday afternoon?

**Well, if you have ever tried to back a boat trailer
down a crowded boat ramp
then load the coolers full of food and beverages
then corral the kids and pets,
I'd have to say: "Yes!"**

**But if it brings your family closer together,
makes some good memories
and is a break from your usual routine . . .
I'd call that rejuvenating.**

**The same goes for hunting or fishing –
- it most definitely is physical work
but it can also be rejuvenating, reinvigorating,
relaxing, re-booting.**

**Becoming "unplugged", revived, ready to face a new week –
- that is the physical purpose for the Sabbath.**

The second application of the commandment is purely spiritual.

We are commanded to take time on the Sabbath –

- which for Christians is the first day of the week commemorating the Resurrection –**
- to reflect upon God.**

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the commandment says:

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

When that commandment was written in Exodus 20:8-11

it differed slightly from how it is written in Deuteronomy.

While the first part in both cases is primarily the same

the second part in Exodus says:

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath

day

and made it holy.

The Exodus commandment calls us to remember the Creator God –

- the One to whom we owe everything**
- the One who created all that is.**

The Deuteronomy commandment calls us

to remember God the Redeemer.

Based upon these two attributes of God

and the commandment to take one day a week

and dwell upon them – think about them –

**There is no doubt in my mind,
that God wants us to halt our daily tasks
and spend some time in prayer and contemplation.
Spend some time worshiping God.**

It is a day to pause and reflect upon God’s love for us.

**The spiritual side of the commandment
is given to us so that we can concentrate on God.**

**It’s hard to concentrate on God
when you’re hauling mulch for your garden –
- or trying to finish a project around the house –
- or repainting your deck.**

**Even though we may mention “God” and “Jesus” several times,
it is certainly not in as reverent way!
Far from it!**

**This spiritual approach to the Commandment
is given to us so we will take the time – and make the effort –
- to grow closer to God.
- to give God a chance to talk to us.
- to give us a chance to renew our acquaintance with God
- to further discern God’s will for us**

That’s something we should be doing every day.

**When I was in Peace Corps,
I found out just how much time it takes every day
just to survive from day to day.**

**There is wood to be cut, fires to be built, water to be hauled –
- and THEN everything may be ready to prepare breakfast.**

**Lunch is pretty much the same thing –
- as is supper.**

**Living in primitive conditions
requires us to work most of the day
just to cover the necessities of life –
- and all that is besides the work we must do.**

**God knows how busy we have become in our modern world–
- how wrapped up we are in our daily tasks.
So, God simply asks for us to reserve time for God.**

CONCLUSION:

From time to time we sing the Hymn: *Take Time to be Holy.*

Listen for a moment to the words:

**Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.**

**Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.**

**Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.**

**In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.**

I have one final word of advice:

Make sure you leave time in your week for God.

**Whether it is getting up, getting dressed and coming to worship,
or simply sitting for 10 extra minutes in your golf cart,
or sitting quietly in your car after shopping . . .**

. . . take time to be holy.

**Time spent with God is the best time you will ever get to spend.
Remember: God loves you – and so do I.**