

Quittin' Time, Except for God

Text: Luke 14:1-11

Hymn: "Seek Where You May to Find a Way" (*LSB* 557)

What may we do and what may we not do on Sunday? For a long time that question has been the subject of many heated discussions in the church. One extreme approach insists that the Old Testament rules now apply to Sunday and that to do any work on Sunday is sinful. At the other extreme are Christians who say that when Jesus came, He abolished the old covenant, together with all the sacrifices and purity laws etc. So, if you want to go to work or mow your lawn or run in a race on Sunday, it's up to you. Makes no difference; all days are the same. And such a view, they'd say, is supported by our Gospel reading, where Jesus seems to be saying over against the Pharisees, "It's okay to do things on the Sabbath."

Now there are very large chunks of the Old Testament which say that the Sabbath day is a day of rest on which you shall not do any work. So let's unpack this.

The Sabbath commandment, as we read in Exodus, is based on God's resting from the work of creation on the seventh day, where God did not so much put His feet up but shifted His focus from creating to sustaining what He had already made. And this work He shared with His human creatures, putting them in a bountiful garden, where everything they needed He himself provided, but everything the rest of creation needed the man was to provide by guarding and keeping it. This harmony, this perfection, this bliss of a never-ending seventh day was destroyed by man's disobedience. Man chose to cut himself off from the source of life. The result was not only that he and his progeny would now die but that they'd be on their own. By the

sweat of his brow man would have to eke out an existence among thorns and thistles. And this anxiety for survival even we 21st-century Americans know and feel. Death still knocks at our door in ways little and big.

Out of this broken world God called for himself a people to bring them back into a relationship where He provides and sustains. Starting with Abraham, God called them and led them so that they might know that whatever they had didn't come because they were so clever at finding it for themselves. Forty years in the wilderness: No bread? God fed them. No water? God gave them water from the rock.

And He led them to a land of plenty and promised as long as they remained faithful to Him there would always be rain in due season and ample food and rest from their enemies. This was the promise of God to Israel. But before He brought them there, He gave them His law so that they might know who they are and what it meant to be who they are. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." And, so, "Stay close to Me, do not cut yourselves loose, do not run after things that cannot sustain you." "Honor me with your lips; bear *My* name, not the name with which you were born, which is just a variant spelling of death and condemnation."

Then follows, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...On it you shall not do any work." Not so you might have a personal day or so that God might make you sit still. "Don't move a muscle or I'll take your cake away." That is not the heart of God. That is not what God is like. God is love. And He gives to us out of His heart of love only. The Sabbath commandment is not about not doing stuff. It's about recognizing what that day is: A rest, an escape from the valley of the shadow of death for one day a week, a return to the conditions of Eden. It doesn't say don't do anything. It says, "Six

days you shall labor, and do all your work”—*your* work—“but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” It belongs to Him. It’s His day. On the seventh day you cease doing your work and instead you enjoy being at the receiving end of God doing His work. He feeds you. He supplies not only your body but above all your soul with the things you need to live. And if your soul lives, you will live not for as long as your body keeps going, but for as long as God is faithful, which is forever.

So when Jesus comes into conflict with the Pharisees and the scribes about the Sabbath, the conflict wasn’t about what’s allowed and what isn’t, as though Jesus had one list and the Pharisees had another, although that’s how the Pharisees saw it. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” was the question. And essentially the Pharisees had their list of all the things that were lawful. “It doesn’t say anywhere here that you can heal; therefore, you can’t heal. Not allowed. Not on the list.”

But again that is not how God functions. What did God do in Paradise? And what did Adam do in Paradise? God rested from creation. God supplied His creation. And He used Adam to care for it. And God hasn’t stopped working and God still does what God does. And so on the Sabbath day, Jesus was perfectly prepared to do good, even if that counted as work according to the rabbinical definition, because He wasn’t doing *His* work. He didn’t go doing things to keep Himself alive. He went around doing things to keep others alive and to restore creation. If somebody with a gash in his head had come into the house where Jesus was having the Sabbath dinner, many of the Pharisees would have been fine with breaking their Sabbath rest to try and keep this person alive. That would be an emergency. Some of them would even have been willing to pick up an animal that had fallen into a well.

This man had dropsy or edema. It's very unpleasant and uncomfortable. It's disfiguring and according to some interpretations of the Mosaic Law renders a person unclean. It's a real problem, but he didn't get it that morning and he wasn't going to die that night. You could have waited 24 hours and come back the next day. It's not an emergency. But that's not the point. What is Jesus doing when He heals a man with dropsy, who is therefore unclean as well as in pain? What is Jesus doing when He removes a disabling spirit from a woman on the Sabbath? What is Jesus doing when He casts out demons on the Sabbath? He's not just doing His work, as opposed to God's. He's doing what God the Father does in Him, which is to restore all creation.

Jesus came to put an end to the rule of death. He came to put an end date on the decay of creation. When you look back in time, are you of the view that the world's just getting better and better and everything's just so much happier than it ever used to be? In some ways it is: less starvation, better preparedness against natural disasters, infant mortality rates down. But you look around and say, Well, sin is still winning; the world is still decaying. And if you feel like it's getting worse and worse, yes it is, and it's not going to get better. Try driving a car just over the brow of a hill and then jump out. For a while it may look as if it's going nice and straight and fast and you think, "Look at it pick up speed! It goes even faster without a driver than with!" But at some point the car's going to hit a bend in the road and there's going to be an almighty crash.

That's precisely the situation with creation. The crash is coming. And it's coming not because of excessive carbon emissions or mutually assured destruction by nuclear weapons. It's coming as the natural consequence of a world that has loosed itself from its Creator. But Jesus is going to come and rescue all creation. And He began that

work of restoration when He came on earth in our flesh. He assumed the role of a creature and He started to do with great faithfulness that work which Adam left unfinished. But He, being the greater Adam, didn't just mend patches of ground here and there. He came to heal all creation of its fundamental brokenness. He proved that in His earthly ministry. He took away the power of death and disease and sin—even on the Sabbath day!—because that is what God does.

And so Jesus didn't expand the definition of work to include ambulance drivers and doctors, nor did He say, "This doesn't count any more; do whatever you like." Instead He drew our attention to what the Sabbath is really all about. And the Sabbath is all about Jesus. The Sabbath is about creation resting in God's care. We find this rest only in Jesus, who came to be our Sabbath rest, who came to call us out of a life overrun by death back into fullness of life in Him through the forgiveness of sins. Your disease, your illness, your weakness, your suffering, whatever it is, is not going to have the final word because Jesus is going to take it away from you forever. And He will raise you into the new creation from which all these things have been banished.

And we as the people of God get to rest in that reality already now. That's why we don't keep the Jewish Sabbath. What the Jewish Sabbath was pointing to came in reality in Jesus. We no longer need to cease from all our work from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset—Jesus is our permanent Sabbath rest all the time. And Christians very early on, even in the New Testament, started worshiping on Sunday instead, because it was on a Sunday that something greater than the completion of creation took place—the redemption of creation when Jesus rose from the dead. And we gather together to sanctify so far as is possible in this fallen world this day of rest. Not simply

by not going to the office so we have more time to watch some millionaires run around with a ball, but above all so that we might come and rest in God's care.

So what should one do on a Sunday? Is it okay to do X, Y, and Z? Wrong question. What was this day given for? It's given for us to receive God's merciful and loving care, for Him to nourish us not with food and drink that perish like we perish but with food and drink that will never perish—His Word, the gift of His Spirit, the Body and Blood of Jesus. And when we so use the Lord's day, we are reminding ourselves and communicating to others that God still loves us, that He still cares for His creation, that the Sabbath rest which He has promised for us is real and we already get to taste it in this life. The author of Hebrews writes, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9). But it is coming. Jesus has already entered into it for us. The saints who have gone before us have already entered into it. The door is open, opened by the pierced hands of Jesus, for you and for me.

Pastor Brent McGuire
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church