

Sermon from 6-3-18

A Reading from the Wisdom of Mark 2:23-28

Jesus went through the wheat fields on the Sabbath. As the disciples made their way, they were picking the heads of wheat. The Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look! Why are they breaking the Sabbath law?"

He said to them, "Haven't you ever read what David did when he was in need, when he and those with him were hungry? During the time when Abiathar was high priest, David went into God's house and ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests were allowed to eat. He also gave bread to those who were with him." Then Jesus said, "The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren't created for the Sabbath. This is why the Human One is ruler even over the Sabbath."

Today's Reflection – "Whose Sabbath is It, Anyway?" Rev Martha Daniels

Will you pray with and for me? Spirit of wisdom, speak through me, in spite of me; may I be a window through which your light of grace may shine. Amen.

And on the seventh day, God rested from creating, and said, this shall be a Sabbath day; and so the seventh day shall be a day of rest; you shall do no work, nor shall your servants, nor your animals. You shall do no work on the Sabbath day, because your God rested on the seventh day.

And humans said, "Well, but define 'work.' And can you define 'day,' too, please? And who, exactly, counts as a servant? And which is the seventh day? And what counts as rest?"

Humans being who we are, various Jewish and Christian traditions came up with various traditions. And so some traditional Orthodox Jewish communities have Sabbath goyim—non-Jewish employees—who go from house to house to turn on and off lights, set tables, wash dishes, and so on—things that the devout cannot do—and of course on Saturday, which is the seventh day of the week. Some Puritan Christians in the colonial US spent Sundays in prayer, reading or hearing sermons; no work beyond the bare minimum needed to feed and milk livestock and family, no real cooking; children could not play, or if they did, the toys were Biblically themed, such as Noah's Ark. And Sunday had taken over as the Sabbath, of course. Other Christian traditions had rules such as no game playing, such as cards; or no secular music; no drinking alcohol on Sundays; stores were closed, especially liquor stores. How many of you remember having to follow some of those rules, or ones like them when you were growing up? No TV, or no board games, or no smoking... When I lived in Germany in the 80's, stores were closed on Sundays, except for restaurants and small flower kiosks near cemeteries.

But were people better because of that? Were they kinder, more generous, more likely to help others, to "do justice, love mercy, to live in fellowship with God?" I am not so

sure. A list of rules, of “do nots,” isn’t a way to help people find what they should do, is it? Anyone who’s worked with kids knows that if you tell them what they can’t do, they will figure out what you’ve left off the list and go do that. “You never said we couldn’t go swimming; you said we couldn’t go to the movies, and we didn’t!” It’s a universal human characteristic. Far better to show people what TO do, and then ask them to do that...which is what Jesus was all about.

Jesus fed, he healed, he taught, he comforted—he even learned and changed his mind a couple of times. He spent a lot of time with people the rest of society thought weren’t worth the time—tax collectors, sex workers, day laborers, women, the marginalized.

The Sabbath day, he’s pointing out, isn’t for people to put fences around and debate endlessly about what’s allowed and not allowed, especially when those rules favor the privileged. Only people who are comfortable can afford to pay servants to do work for them on the Sabbath; everyone else is, therefore, technically a sinner. Who can afford to take a day off every week when you’re a laborer and need every coin to feed your family, or need to cultivate your crops and tend your herds? When you’re hungry, or your family is, you do what you have to do, and the Sabbath rules fade into unimportance. To be fair, Leviticus does say that illness or mortal danger does override Sabbath rules; but not simple hunger or economic survival.

The Sabbath rest is important, make no mistake. We do tend to be too busy, in our modern world. It’s ironic that in a time when it’s actually economically easier for more people to take that Sabbath, to unplug and rest, fewer people, percentage-wise, actually do. We do need to put the phone—or tablet or computer—away sometimes, and trust that nothing is so important that it can’t wait four or eight hours, and if it can’t, someone will find you somehow, and in the meantime, you get to rest. Here is something to think about. In the last week, what is the longest your phone or tablet has been further than arm’s reach from you? I’m not asking for, “Well, but there’s a family thing,” or “But my job...” Yes, I know about “my job—“ my job, too—and the family thing too. Just think about it. Was it 10 minutes? An hour? Two hours? Think about that.

The Sabbath was made for us—for rest, refreshment—not us for the Sabbath. It’s meant to be a time of reconnection to the Divine, to Spirit, to fill our reservoir for the days ahead, however we need to do that. Worship is one way—a very powerful way. We gather together to consider words of wisdom, to share a community meal as Jesus did, to join in prayers of hope and healing and grief, to share what is in our hearts, to receive God’s blessings, and then to spend time in laughter and conversation. Sometimes we need time to meditate, to clear our minds of struggle or confusion or conflict—we offer that twice a month here, too. Sometimes it’s personal time that works best, or reading or prayer. Without that Sabbath time, our spirits become clogged, tired, anxious, cranky—the equivalent of an overtired toddler in need of a nap.

Take your Sabbath rest—it’s a Divine gift to you. In all God’s many names, amen.