

Text: Mark 2:23-28.

Second Sunday After Pentecost.

June 3, 2018.

God's love and peace are yours this Lord's day and every day. Amen.

What's the deal with the Sabbath Day? It's so confusing. What does Sabbath even mean? The word Sabbath comes from a Hebrew word that means rest. Sabbath also sounds like the Hebrew word for seven, as the Sabbath took place on the seventh day of the week. Ok. But now I'm more confused. Because clearly the Sabbath Day was an important commandment. It made the top ten list. It even made the top three, right after have no other gods and don't use God's name in vain. But here Jesus seems to say it wasn't that important. That Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath Day, so he can do whatever he wants. His disciples don't have to rest. They can work. And we don't follow the Sabbath Day. We don't worship on Saturday. We don't say it's a sin to work on Sunday. It's confusing.

Agreed. There are parts of the Sabbath Day laws that are temporary. And there are parts that are timeless. We can tell the difference from the Bible itself and from the words of our loving Savior, Jesus, who does us a favor here and helps explain the timeless meaning of the Sabbath. The timeless meaning is to set aside time, the most important time, to find rest for your soul, rest in God's Word, rest in the forgiveness of your sins that only Jesus can bring. Rest. God's Word. Jesus. Those are the timeless truths. The seventh day. The absolute requirement to do no work at all. Those are temporary. You see, God gave the Sabbath to serve us. He didn't create us to be slaves to the Sabbath. Or as Jesus said it. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So let's make sure we understand the situation here. Jesus' followers were walking along, on the Sabbath Day and they were hungry. They picked a few kernels of grain, rolled them in their hands, blew away the chaff and got something to eat. This was totally fine. It wasn't stealing. God's law said if you are walking along in a field and you are hungry, you can eat. Don't put any in your bag for the road. But take all you can and eat all you take. Notice, even the Pharisees didn't argue with the eating or the possible stealing. They argued with the working. On the Sabbath.

They accused them of doing what was unlawful. They were harvesting grain. The Bible said farmers weren't to harvest grain on the Sabbath, even during harvest season. The disciples were harvesting. They were working. They were breaking the Sabbath. Come on! Is picking a few wild blackberries from a blackberry tree on a walk through the forest working? Harvesting?

The Pharisees had an ulterior motive. They weren't really concerned about upholding the Bible. They were more concerned with upholding their human laws. They were more concerned with discrediting Jesus' followers so they could ultimately discredit Jesus. The Pharisees had this all-too-familiar passive aggressive approach. When they were trying to get at Jesus, they attacked his followers. When they were trying to get at Jesus' followers, they came up to Jesus.

Jesus put an end to their accusation. He nipped their nonsense before it could go any further. You guys missed the point! You didn't see the intent of the Sabbath. Haven't you read in the Bible? Haven't you ever read this? What we read in our first lesson? How could you not possibly have read this? This was a very scolding scolding for the Pharisees. They claimed to know the Bible. They went around showing off all they had read and learned and even memorized. But Jesus told them, "You claim to be quoting from the Bible, but you are only quoting the parts that back up your preconceived notions. You are ignoring

any part of the Bible that doesn't fit what you have already decided to believe. You are missing the point. The intent of God's laws, is love for people. You are so focused on your human laws, you would let people starve."

There's a Pharisee alive in each one of us. Read the Bible and focus on the laws. Work hard to keep them and then I'll be better than everyone else and I can get to heaven because I am so good. I mean look around, the summer slump has already started. And school isn't even over yet. But I'm still here. I never miss Sunday because I'm a good Sabbath keeper. The Pharisee in our hearts looks so much at God's law, he misses the point. The law shows our sin, not how good we are. And oddly, the Pharisee in our hearts goes to the other extreme and ignores the law when it's convenient and focuses only on God's love. That's certainly the more popular opinion in our world today. Want to skip church? Sure. God is love. He accepts people who don't hear his Word. Want to have sex? Sure. Love is love and God is love so have sex anytime with anyone. God is love. Love is love. The end result of these two Pharisaical extremes is the same. Ignore the Gospel and see no need for Jesus and reject the way to heaven. Ignore the law and see no need for Jesus and reject the way to heaven. You do know there's only one other option when you reject the way to heaven? That's the way to hell.

That's why we need Jesus. Only he kept the Sabbath Day perfectly. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, as was his custom. He kept this top three law, in your place, as your Substitute. He kept all the other commandments, the top ten commandments, and all the commandments, in your place, as your Substitute. Jesus came as one under the law, to pay the price for those under the law, so that Jesus is proud to call us his children, his perfect children, perfect in his eyes, perfect because of his perfection, perfection forever. Jesus died for all our failures to keep the commandments. Every time we ignored a part of God's word? Forgiven. Every time we used God's love as a license to leave behind his love letter? Forgotten. Forever. Washed clean in Jesus' blood. Removed as far as the east is from the west. And Jesus rose. He rose on the first day of the week, giving us a new Lord's day. We still gather every Sunday to remember his resurrection. He rose to free us to gather any day of the week. Thursday or Monday or Saturday or Tuesday. He rose to make every day the Lord's day, every day a day to rest for our souls. Rest in his resurrection. Rest in his restoration. Rest in his written word. It doesn't have to be just one day of the week we find rest in God's Word. The timeless truth of the Sabbath Day is that every day Jesus comes to us in his Word and gives us rest for our souls. The timeless truth is that we set aside special time, holy time, (holy means to set aside), time to gather with fellow rest seekers and find our rest in God's word, find our rest in Jesus. That's why God made the Sabbath Day, to give us rest.

Let's get back to the account with David and his companions and Abiathar. Now you don't have to be a Bible scholar to notice that in our first lesson the priest was called Ahimelech. Here Jesus calls him Abiathar. What's up? From other parts of the Bible, we can see that one man was referred to by two different names. Very common in the Bible. Mark, who wrote this book, was also called John. Simon was called Peter. Even Jesus is called Christ. A skeptic would jump on this and call it a contradiction, the Bible is a fairy tale that can't get its facts straight. But think about it. If you were making up a story and wanted to fool people, you'd use the same name to avoid any suspicion. One guy. Called by different names in different places.

Why did Jesus refer to this account? Well, David and his companions (companion actually means someone you eat bread with) were hungry. Jesus' disciples were hungry. God's law of love to feed a hungry person was more important than a human law regarding the Sabbath. God's love is more

important than human laws. God's love is more important than human laws. Jesus was telling the Pharisees, "You missed the point of the Sabbath. You were so focused on the law. You missed the love." The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Have to think about this one a little. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Lutherans like to inquire, "What does this mean?" Well, we can go start at the creation of the world. God created people on the sixth day. God created the Sabbath on the seventh day. So people came first. And God made the Sabbath later as a way to serve people. The Sabbath was to give people rest. First of all, rest for the soul. Rest in setting aside a special day to hear God's Word. This rest for the soul on the Sabbath Day was even a picture of our perfect and eternal rest in heaven. I pray you get glimpses of heaven every time you come to worship. God's Word and the singing and the announcement of forgiveness and confessing your faith with fellow believers is a beautiful pick me up for the soul. The Sabbath was also created to give rest to the body. You took the day off work. Even during the busy season. You started your rest on Friday night so you were good and rested for worship on Saturday morning.

But I think you can imagine that some figured the night off was a night to party and sleep in and figure rest for the body on Saturday morning was more important than rest for the soul. I do recall seeing more people in Israel in a restaurant on Friday, than I saw heading to church on Saturday. But actually, more people, like the Pharisees, went the other way and ironically made the day of rest a burden. They considered it a burden to take the day off. They wanted to work and make money. They complained, "When will the Sabbath be over? So we can sell stuff?" Others were so concerned to do no work they defined work down to the very last detail. Like rolling a few kernels of grain in your hand was work. Carrying hot water in your home was work. Because you might spill on the floor and that would be cleaning. Today, people don't turn on light switches or push elevator buttons, because that creates a spark and a spark is a fire and the law says, "Don't light a fire in your dwellings on the Sabbath." What a burden! Where's the rest?

Jesus had to explain. The Sabbath was made to serve people. People were not made to serve the Sabbath. Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, explained the Sabbath. It's not a day to use as a license for licentiousness. It's a day God gave in love. It's a day to find rest for your soul in his Word.

So where's your Sabbath? When's your rest? Still Saturday when you don't have to work and only a time of rest for the body? Only one hour on Sunday to get a little rest for the soul? Every day find your rest in Jesus. Every day revel in his forgiveness and be restored. Every day set aside holy time with God's Word. The Word gives timeless truth. Rest for the soul. The Word brings us Jesus. Eternal rest for the soul.

Amen.