

The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost – Lectionary 9 06/02/2024

What is sabbath or what is the sabbath day? Different religions have different days, thus we can't say one day is totally right or wrong? Christians have said throughout history that Sunday is our sabbath. But what about Christian churches who have Saturday night services?

At one point in our history, Sundays were strictly observed as "the sabbath". Stores and even restaurants were closed. Chick-Filet even today is closed on Sundays. Life has evolved and some may say things have progressed. Others might say that we have gotten off track.

We now have sports games on Sunday mornings. They seem to take precedent over worship services. Notice I didn't say sabbath. The original Hebrew root of the word means to cease or desist. The double b creates an intensive force. We have often thought of sabbath as rest and relaxation, but it's original root only means cease from activity.

Of course, with any word or in a sense concept it has a history. To go through the whole history would not be helpful in the midst of a sermon. In the initial stages of its evolution the sabbath was observed by ceasing from all physical labor and it was considered as taboo if they didn't cease. It was regarded as an unlucky day, an evil day under control of gods or spirits. Thus, one didn't want to allow gods or spirit to take control.

The sabbath is of Jewish origin and eventually became a day with positive respect to the Deity. The observance of the seventh day of the week was a sign between God and God's people that on that seventh they would rest as God rested on the seventh day of creation. Of course this was Saturday. In trying to enforce it, it became a burden.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is trying to reframe the importance of sabbath to not make it a burden. The burden developed from human beings trying to interpret the law and enforce it to maintain control. Jesus never came to do away with the law, but to allow it to breath and support human beings with guidelines in which to live in relationship with God and neighbor.

The Pharisees in our Gospel lesson were the keepers of the law. Thus, they were always looking for any infraction. The disciples were hungry, thus as they were walking through a field of grain, they began to pluck heads of grain. They were guilty of two infractions of the law.

The disciples were travelling and harvesting on the sabbath. They should have stayed where they had been the day before and prepared their food. Now I

would guess that the Pharisees thought they should have fasted or essentially gone hungry since they were not prepared.

Jesus reminded the Pharisees of a time when David and his companions were hungry. David entered the house of God and ate the bread of the presence. It is not lawful for anyone to eat this bread except the priests. David gave some to his companions also.

Jesus in trying to reframe the law about the sabbath, told the Pharisees that that the sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the sabbath. He was trying to point out that it's not about worshipping the law to the detriment of people. I'm sure the Pharisees did not like to hear this.

Then to be more bolder, Jesus said that the son of Man was lord even of the sabbath. I guess Jesus told the Pharisees that they did not know what they were talking about. There is no doubt that their anger was grower quickly. Who does this Jew think he is?

Now Jesus entered the synagogue and came across a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees eyes were on Jesus now ready to pounce on anything that he did. Jesus knew what was going on. He called the man forward and said to them "Is it lawful to do good or harm on the sabbath, to save or kill? They didn't know how to answer the question, thus, they remained silent.

Jesus looked around with anger and grief at their hardness of heart and then said to the man, "stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored. Now Jesus did not have to do this healing on the sabbath as his hand would probably not have gotten any worse by the next day or even at sundown.

In this healing, Jesus dd more than just restore the man's physical health, which was of course wonderful. The culture at that time was that most of the work was manual labor, thus the man could not provide for himself or his family. This healing on the sabbath was a restoration, a liberation, a new freedom to return to be a productive person in his culture.

The Pharisees were so angry they went out and colluded with the Herodians. They would not normally be doing anything with them, but they willing to do anything they could to take out Jesus. When a restoration for this man creates such anger and contempt, there is something drastically wrong.

Now to our sabbath. We have considered our sabbath to be on Sunday. Paul suggested to his Christian brothers and sisters to change the day of sabbath from Saturday to the first day of the week. Part of the thinking was that light was created on the first day and that Jesus, the light of the world, rose on the first day of the week. So how do we observe our sabbath?

You might say, well look at where we are. There are some churches that literally talk about obligations. The message that I hear from Jesus is that it is not about the day as much as it is about what happens on or in our sabbath time. If sabbath is to be about cease and desist from normal activity this is when rest, relaxation and liberation and freedom can occur. When we use a law or guideline that restricts and binds, it is time to rethink it.

Luther's meaning to the 3rd commandment, 'Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy,' is 'we are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God's Word or preaching, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

This is not always about a day or place, but maybe more about our connection with God in Jesus Christ. It is about fostering our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. It is about being relaxed enough to focus on listening and what I talked about last week, being in dialogue with God in Jesus Christ which asks us to cease and desist from our normal activity.

Sabbath time can be different for all of us. All of us process differently, thus our dialogue will be different. "Have tos" are restricting. It is when we do things because we choose to and want to that we are able to relax and enjoy them.

Anything that restricts us and tells us this is what you have to do is not healthy for us. At that point, we would be allowing it to have control over us. Jesus says sabbath is for us to enjoy, to stop and refresh ourselves. Once again in order for that to happen we are asked to cease and desist from normal activity. I believe the invitation to make sabbath holy is meant to be, taking the time to foster our relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

The commandments that God has given such as remember the sabbath day and keep it holy was given to us to help us remember to take time to connect with God in Jesus Christ. We are reminded to be intentional about it, but not let it restrict us.

This may mean exploring other ways to connect with God in Jesus Christ. I hope coming here to worship is a desire and not an obligation. Do we desire to have sabbath time? Are we willing to allow it to happen? Our lives become so busy and full that time with Jesus is not always a priority.

Jesus reminds us today to desire to make our sabbath holy. A time that refreshes our connection with God in Jesus Christ. Our sabbath time is to be about refreshment and not restriction. It is about stopping what we normally do to connect and reconnect with God in Jesus Christ. Our challenge today is to assess our sabbath time. Are we ceasing our normal activity? Are we connecting at some

time or place with God in Jesus Christ and refreshing ourselves? If not, it's time to make a change. If yes, continue to observe it.

Let us pray: God of the sabbath, we are here today observing the sabbath and connecting with you and each other. In our daily lives it is often difficult to cease our normal activity and connect with you. May your Spirit assist us in connecting with you in old ways as well as new and creative ways that we may grow closer to you. In Jesus name, Amen