

Sermon Reading: Mark 2:23-28

Sermon Theme: Real Rest on God's Day of Rest

Sometimes you wake up in the morning and you are rip, roaring, and ready to take on this brand new day. And then there are those other days. Do you ever wake up feeling like you already lost? Because of what happened yesterday and then because of what's going on today, it might feel like a new tidal wave of things fighting for your attention comes crashing down and you are barely out of bed. If someone offered you a break, would you take it? A break from work, responsibilities, children, parents, emotional stress, physical pain, burdens of life, struggles of someone you love, a break from anything, would you take it?

In the hospital or even when you are sick you know how you are supposed to rest. Everyone tells you that. But instead of resting, your mind is going with all of the other things you think you should be doing. Even when we are supposed to be resting it's hard to catch a break. Think of at night, we know we need to wind down in order to get good rest. But then you start thinking about your day and there comes those thoughts of, "I could have done this; I should have done that; I'll make sure to do it tomorrow; maybe that one can get pushed off to next week." And now it's taking longer to rest. We need it—from the person who doesn't think they do much to the individual who is constantly doing something we need a certain type of rest. And Jesus tells us, "**Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28). You know that true, lasting rest is found in Jesus. But for some reason, we sure seem to make things more complicated for ourselves.

That's what's going on in the account from Mark 2:23-28. One Sabbath Day, the first day of the week for the Jews, Jesus and his disciples are taking a stroll through the grain fields. And as they are walking along, the disciples are feeling a little hungry and could use a snack. So, they pick some of the heads of grain and in Luke we are told they rub their hands together to separate the parts they would be able to eat. Sounds innocent enough. But the Pharisees, who always seem to be not too far behind Jesus, have a big problem with what the disciples are doing. Confronting Jesus they say, "**Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?**"

So what is the Sabbath? When God gave his Law to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, he gave them this command recorded for us in Exodus 20, "**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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 animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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 Sabbath was a day to rest and not work. But picking heads of grain and eating them seems hardly like any work at all. How is what the disciples are doing unlawful? It wasn't the fact that they were picking heads of grain from someone's field; that was permitted in God's Law (Deuteronomy 23:25). The issue for the Pharisees was the day that the disciples were doing this: the Sabbath. You see, in order to make sure to remember the Sabbath day and to not work, the rabbis had written up a *catalogue of thirty-nine principal works, subdivided into six minor categories under each of those thirty-nine of works that one is not supposed to do on the Sabbath*. It's all very thorough to make sure you know what is considered work or not. And what the disciples were doing was considered unlawful according to these categories.

Jesus answered the Pharisees by pointing them to that hero of the Old Testament David and what is recorded for us in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus reminds them how David and his companions were hungry and in need, **“In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”** In the holy place of the tabernacle there were twelve loaves of consecrated bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Each Sabbath, twelve fresh loaves were offered to God and the old eaten by the priests, and it was supposed to be only the priests. Fleeing from King Saul, David appealed to the high priest for food for himself and his men. God did not condemn either David for asking for the bread or the priest for giving it. He ate and lived to tell about it. Jesus' conclusion: **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”**

God desires mercy not sacrifice. God made the Sabbath Day to benefit his people. That word Sabbath—*shabat*—means “Rest.” God gave his people a command for a specific day for them to rest: rest physically, mentally, and spiritually. It was meant to keep the people healthy by mandating rest from work. You do that the other six days; on the Sabbath take a break. It was meant to give an opportunity to take a break and meditate, think about God and his will, and find spiritual rest in him. Luther explains this commandment in the Small Catechism, “We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” Jesus kept that Sabbath Law perfectly so that we are not bound to one day. We have been set free to rest every day to gladly hear and learn God's Word.

And instead of even doing that one day, all too many neglect God's Word every day. That which is needed, is ignored or made more complicated. This Sabbath Day was meant to give people rest. But the rabbis were so focused on the “not doing any work” part that they added more work and took away the rest. We do this too and all too often when we burden consciences of others and ourselves. We do this when we go to church, when we worship only because “we have to” or because someone tells us we need to. We add burdens when we get caught up and hung up on different traditions and how things always have been

done. We do this when we come to worship only because it's out of habit. We burden consciences when we focus on the work, what we do, and not what God gives.

God gives us rest with the freedom in Christ and how do we react? We make ourselves slaves to our schedules, other people's schedules, and filling up our schedules. We might try and find rest in always being busy and doing something thinking the more things you do the better person you are.

God says, "Rest." We say, "Work." Work on the yard. Work in your place of employment. Work on all these *things*. There's always more work that needs to be done. And as much as we like to think that we just need to finish this one thing and it will lead to rest, there's always more.

Even when we are here in worship where we are given rest, we are restless waiting for the service to be done, restless thinking about what needs to be finished this afternoon, restless and easily distracted by everything else that is going on in the building and what is going on around us and in our lives.

Jesus says, "Come and I will give you *shabat*-rest." We say, "No thanks." For instance, summer time: a time of rest and vacation from school and crazy schedules of the fall is filled up with visits, vacations, things to do outside. Not that that is all bad; remember we are free. But then we give and allow excuses for someone else who is always busy and seems to never to take time for Jesus and we too are tempted to take a vacation from Jesus instead.

God says, "Your rest is right here with me!" And how often do we try and find rest elsewhere: drugs, alcohol, pornography, mind-numbing watching TV, playing video games, internet, work, other people, etc. etc. The problem is that rest isn't lasting rest. It might temporarily numb your mind for a little bit, let you zone out for some time, it might keep you busy and your mind occupied so it feels like you have rest. But it doesn't last.

It's interesting, the majority of people who haven't been in church for quite some time, when confronted, will agree they need to be in church more often. "I should go, I know," one might say. But why? It's not because God needs you in church. He doesn't need anything from you. You aren't doing him any favors by reading his Word, being in this building, or sitting in the pew. So why are you here? Because **you** need it. You may not always realize it or feel like it, but you need it. When we hear God's Law and feel it convict us, when we see and recognize the seriousness of sin, it doesn't give us rest. Those thoughts of how we hurt our relationship with God and each other, it burdens and weighs on our consciences. We see the sin in the lives of others, the sin in our life and it can feel like everything is just crazy.

And so God comes to you and gives you rest. The Sabbath Day was also to point the people's eyes ahead to Christ. The rest of the Sabbath was a shadow of the eternal rest to come in Christ. That's what he gives when Jesus lifted the burden of God's Law that weighed heavily upon you and placed it on his shoulders as he walked this earth. He fulfilled the obligation of God's Law, kept the Sabbath day, and made it holy. Carrying the weight of the Law, and the debt your sin owed, Jesus was nailed to that cross so that the burden of the Law and its curse is removed from you. Jesus rested three days in that tomb not because he was tired, but because that's what God's Word said he would do. And when he rose from the grave, he guaranteed and gives you real rest. Rest from sins because they were paid for and forgiven because of his perfect life and innocent death. Rest from the devil because Jesus crushed his head and defeated him. Rest from death because death has been swallowed up in victory with Jesus rising from the dead and you are made alive in Jesus.

This rest isn't just for one day of the week. This is yours every day at any time and gives it to you in your personal time with him and his Word. God knows we need it. God expects us to work and to not be lazy. He also expects us to rest. So he gave this command to remember the Sabbath Day for our benefit and the benefit of others. So we come together at the beginning of our week to be given rest together as God's people, joining in confession, prayer, praise, communion encouraging and building each other up in God's house so that we are ready to go for another week. Think about how someone comes back from a rest-filled vacation feeling rejuvenated and ready to go. So we come to God's house where at the baptismal font your sins were washed away and you were clothed in Jesus' robe of perfection and called a holy child of God. We come to God's house where he gives us rest in a personal way with his body and blood given for you for the forgiveness of sins. You know this forgiveness is for you and are assured it's for you because it is you who personally receives and touches it with your mouth and hand. He gives us rest so that we are ready to go out and share this rest in serving God and each other. So no, you don't have to come to church. But we want to and get to come to God's house where God comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

St. Augustine once said, "Our souls are restless until they find their rest in God." Jesus gives you real rest not just on Sunday, but every day. Rest from the Law. Rest from your sins. Rest from your busyness. Jesus, who is the Lord of the Sabbath, gives you real rest. Amen.