

True Sabbath Rest

Sermon for the 20th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Mark 2:23-28



²³ One Sabbath He was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, His disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

When it's cold, I wear a hat to protect myself from the cold. When the sun is shining, I wear sunglasses and sunscreen to protect myself from the sun. And when there is Corona, I wear a mask, not only to protect myself, but also to protect others. Because wearing a mask is not just about protecting myself but about protecting others, mask wearing is also an emotional issue. Some feel their freedom is oppressed when new measures are taken. Others say, if others aren't wearing a mask, I don't need to do that either. Wearing a mask is uncomfortable but if everyone around the whole world consistently wore a mask from now on, we would soon no longer have the Corona problem.

Just as wearing a mask today is a social responsibility, observing the Sabbath day was a social responsibility of the Jews in that time, which was for the good of the whole people. When the pharisees criticized Jesus, they didn't only have bad intentions. The Sabbath was directly connected to the Creator, according to their understanding. And these Pharisees believed: if every Israelite in the entire world would observe the Sabbath properly just once, then the Messiah would come, and we would all come into the Messianic Kingdom of Peace. It's no wonder that they were so mad at Jesus. By openly breaking the Sabbath with His disciples, Jesus made it worse for everyone. The question that we must next ask is, why Jesus is so openly opposed to the Sabbath commandment? Jesus didn't advocate weakening or ignoring any of the other Ten Commandments. Some commandments, such as the 6th Commandment which discusses adultery, Jesus even reinforces the commandment by not allowing divorce, contrary to the popular Jewish opinion. But Jesus clearly has an ambivalent relationship to the Sabbath commandment and, at any rate, doesn't support the popular limitations and commands of the Pharisees. Since Jesus didn't do anything by chance, it is worth asking: "What was Jesus actually trying to say when He broke the Sabbath?" The answer actually lies in the Jewish expectation of the Messiah, which Jesus not only knew, but had also seen Himself. Namely, when the Messiah comes, the Sabbath will be perfected. This was also Jesus' opinion. And Jesus was the Messiah. That's why Jesus is the Lord

of the Sabbath. In Jesus, the great Sabbath rest has begun for which people had waited for generations... In Jesus, we can come to rest from all our burden of sin and lay everything on His shoulders. In Jesus, we know we are in direct relationship with God and that's why our longing search for perfection finally comes to rest in Jesus. If you present this Messianic explanation of the Sabbath to Jewish scholars today, they would immediately disagree and list all the terrible things in our world that would confirm their belief that Jesus could not have been the Messiah because the messianic time had so obviously not arrived. But it's not only the Jewish scholars who say this, many others also say this. And they say that you can't believe in Jesus because the world is still evil. Our world has even gotten worse. They think if Jesus can't visibly save the world here and now, He can't be the Messiah. But Jesus knows these two worlds Himself: One world is to be saved in Him... and the second is the expectation of perfection when He comes again. We Christians also live in this tension. We are baptized and saved and yet not perfect. Sometimes we hit rock bottom through our own sins and bad strokes of fate and we don't know how to get on with our lives. Why does God do nothing? Why doesn't God answer my prayers? These are the questions asked in such a situation. And sometimes, I ask myself, why so little has changed in my life after my Baptism? Why am I still plagued by the same sins as before? Why can I see so little of Jesus? And that's exactly why it is so important that we let this Jesus be lord of the Sabbath. We still need a place and a time where we can let ourselves fall into Jesus. We need a place where Jesus takes over the controls and we no longer must struggle with the many problems in our world. We need a place where all the appeals of Satan must be silent and where only Jesus has the word. The first Christians intentionally moved the Sabbath, which is actually a Saturday, to Sunday because they knew that Jesus stands in the middle of the Sabbath. They wanted to express that this Jesus is lord of the Sabbath. And Jesus didn't just fulfill the Sabbath commandments. He also carried away all the sins and mistakes that we have, simply by His resurrection! If we meet here on Sunday, then we may really rest in the resurrection of Jesus. On Sunday, we can turn off all worries including cell phones, computers, and everything else and we can look to Jesus. We may also dream about another world that will come to completion when Jesus comes again. Then, we will finally arrive home and be with God. We need this Sunday of rest! Martin Luther deliberately focused on this aspect of Sunday in the explanation of the 3rd Commandment. Instead of "... you should not work or you should not go fishing on Sunday or anything else..." the explanation of the 3rd Commandment says:

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

And our verse for the week from Micah 6:8 tells us today, *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

For over 1500 years, Christians have been invited to this Sabbath rest on Sunday so that God's Word can be preached and heard. Instead of keeping the commandments, an invitation to rest is made on the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Every Sunday, we celebrate a feast of resurrection. In fact, it is a major crisis that churches must be closed in our time. In many regions around the world, churches are threatened with closure again. It must be like that. For God made the Sabbath for people and not people for the Sabbath. But all the more important that we then invite others to this Sabbath rest in Jesus in all other ways that are available to us. It is not enough to maintain certain orders and traditions and then pat ourselves on the back that we did everything right again. The Son of Man, the Lord of the Sabbath can also overturn what we think is important. But how do we celebrate the Sabbath? Perhaps

exactly as the disciples of Jesus did it: And what did they do? They walked with Jesus. That is: They spent time with Jesus. Dear congregation, we can still shape our Sabbath today after this example. Instead of googling and watching the umpteenth film... or working yourself to the bone... listen to the sermon on Sunday; experience community with other Christians and be connected to our Lord in a very special way through Holy Communion. And if that also doesn't work, I know that the Lord of the Sabbath will find a way to be with us. Amen.