

Sermon for 6-2-24  
Text: Mark 2:23-3:6  
2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Dear friends in Christ, God's grace and peace be with you now and always. Amen!

There's a Peanuts cartoon where the first frame shows Snoopy the dog resting on his back on top of his doghouse with his eyes closed. Lucy approaches him and says, "Sleeping again."

The next frame shows her walking away and saying, "I don't know why you need so much rest."

After she leaves, Snoopy sits up and thinks to himself, "I need plenty of rest in case tomorrow is a great day."

Then he lays down again and thinks, "It probably won't be, but if it is, I'll be ready!"

**What does it say about humans that God had to include remembering the sabbath day as one of the 10 commandments?**

- It's good for us and for our communities to have weekly sabbath
- We probably won't make time for it unless it's a commandment from God.

The Peanuts cartoon pokes gentle fun at our cultural fear of laziness. How many times have we thought to ourselves (or even said to others), "I don't know why you need so much rest." And yes, too much rest can be a sign that something is wrong.

But sometimes we just need to rest.

It's amazing to me that we spend 1/3 of our lives sleeping (if we're lucky). It's hard for humans to be awake more than 16-17 hours before we need, theoretically, around 7-8 hours of sleep. We're biologically disposed to need regular rest.

However, for multiple reasons we often fight it—or we don't have permission from others or ourselves to claim it. Yet it's part of our identity as people of God.

My husband grew up on a dairy farm, and as many of you know, dairy farming is a way of life. No matter what, the cows have to be milked twice a day. As soon as he was old enough, he helped in the barn every day, morning and evening.

My husband did not like farming or dealing with the cows. He deeply appreciates the work ethic he learned and the ways his parents worked so hard to support their family. He will always see himself as a farm kid.

But—he will never forget the feeling of the waking up on his first morning at college and not having to go out to milk the cows. **He realized that daily milking was no longer a part of his life.** He had a new identity, and a freedom from the daily grind of farming because of the sacrifices of his parents and their support of him in college.

Tim's younger brother bought his own farm and dreams of quitting his day job so he can milk cows full-time. His identity is different than Tim's. Liberations means different things to different people!

Our Gospel reading is from Mark chapter 2, close to the beginning of the Gospel, but already Jesus is in deep conflict with the Pharisees, who see themselves as the protectors of the law. They are the respected religious leaders in the Jewish community whose concern for Jesus ramps up throughout chapter 2.

**One thing to note about the Pharisees is they are rightly concerned about the sacredness of the sabbath day.**

In Jesus' day, sabbath was a crucial practice to the Jewish community.

On the sabbath, then and now, the Jewish community celebrates and remembers God's redemption of their ancestors the Israelites, who were released from slavery in Egypt by God through Moses' leadership. Sabbath became part of their new identity. **It became a sign of their liberation.**

They worked nonstop for generations, their bodies only tools for labor, and sabbath was a luxury for the powerful. God gave them the commandment

to rest as a gift and as a new identity. They were now people who rested, whose bodies were meant to be cared for, who set aside time for God.

Our reading from Deuteronomy today says to the Israelites, “remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.”

For generations, Jewish communities have observed weekly sabbath as a essential part of their identity. It’s a sign for them to remember they are a liberated people who work for the liberation of others. Sabbath reminds us to dream about a time when all oppression ceases and new life is everywhere, when all creation is able to rest and be with God. In Jesus’ time, this was especially true.

So the Pharisees were very concerned about Jesus’ actions on the sabbath. They see his disciples plucking grain in the field and the Pharisees worry about their example of breaking the law. They were known as upstanding, devout, religious leaders. We don’t have to look too hard before we see reflections of the Pharisees in ourselves. It can be very difficult to know when to adhere to the law and when to let it go—when it is helpful and when it is harmful.

Jesus doesn’t delight in breaking the law. He is working to expand their understanding of it. Sometimes the demands of the law are set aside when there are greater needs to be met. The Pharisees may have been right about the Sabbath, but “right” doesn’t necessarily mean holy, or compassionate, or loving.

In our Bible study last Tuesday (we meet every noon, but won’t meet for the next 2 Tuesdays), we discussed the question, “What makes sabbath holy?”

If we look at the descriptions of sabbath in Scripture, it is “enjoying a day of delight,” “worshiping the Lord,” “laying aside ordinary work,” and fighting only in self-defense.

It’s tempting to try to define sabbath so we know we’re doing it right. But the direction we have is simple—rest and delight in God, to remember our

identities as children of God, and to dream of and work for the liberations of others from oppression.

Sabbath is about thriving—our own and our neighbor's, about trusting God, and about remembering the holiness around us—in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Thanks be to God. Amen!