

Mark 2:23-28 *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ Then 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."*

God made this time for you

1. Ceremonial laws were made for man, not the other way around
2. God gives rest

It is unofficially summer. School is out. The weather is getting warmer and it's June. Unlike last year, this summer we will be able to participate in many activities that we missed out on last year: Brewer games and Timber rattler games, concerts in Houdini plaza and the pools will be open, I think. What's the best part of going to the swimming pool? Jumping off the diving boards, going down slides, seeing how deep you can go, playing with friends? Or is the best part of going to the pool the rules? No running, no horseplay, one person on the board at a time. Sometimes we may not like the rules whether at the pool, at school, driving in the car or whatever, but these rules are not just there to take the fun out of life. These rules are in place for you, to keep you safe. Today, Jesus teaches us the correct understanding of the Sabbath and he helps us see that God made this time for you.

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. Jesus' disciples were hungry. As they walked along, they plucked some of the grain that was growing in the fields. They rubbed it in their hands to remove the husk and ate the grain. Not much of a meal, but, as I said, the disciples were hungry.

To the Pharisees, that was work. *The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"* The Pharisees had made the Sabbath more of a burden than a day of rest. They worked at not working on the Sabbath. It became just one more thing that people must do to earn blessing from God. They taught that when one observes the Sabbath properly it is as though he has fulfilled the whole Torah, and one desecrates the Sabbath, it is as though he has denied the whole Torah. So, in order to observe the Sabbath properly, they added all kinds of rules to the Sabbath. For example, a hangnail may be removed by hand, if it is mostly detached and causing pain. It was forbidden to open or close the door of an oven. It was a violation of the Sabbath to spill liquid on the ground because that may cause something to grow. You could walk 2000 steps, but if you walked 2001, you violated the Sabbath. You were not permitted to carry anything on the Sabbath.

We think some of this is ridiculous, but it isn't just the Jews who have a fixation on the law. The Puritans of New England had similar rules. Two lovers, John Lewis and Sarah Chapman, were accused and tried for sitting together under an apple tree on the Lord's Day. A soldier was fined 40 shillings for wetting a piece of old hat to put in his shoe to protect his foot. Captain Kemble of Boston, returning from a three-year voyage, kissed his wife on the doorstep of their house. Since this happened on the Sabbath, he was put in the stocks for several hours for lewd behavior. (Alice Morse Earle, The Sabbath in Puritan New England)

You see how people have a fascination for rules and turning rules into our obligation to God. Jesus wanted us to understand rules in a different way. *He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ 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."* The bread that he is talking about is the bread that was put in the holy place of the Temple every day by the priests. According to the Old Testament law, only the priests may eat this bread when they change out the old for the new. What would the Pharisees have done? Would they have let David and his men starve or would they have done what the priest did? And aren't what Jesus' disciples were doing the same thing? *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

"Is it against your religion for people to smoke? Does your church allow people to get tattoos? What does the church say about cremation?" You may have heard or even asked questions like this. Those inside the church want simple answers about what to do or not do. Those outside the church want to know what rules our church has, because

for many people religion is just a matter of dos and don'ts. It's not surprising that many reduce Christianity to a code of conduct that must be followed.

But that's not the purpose of the law. It's not about what we must do, what rules we must follow to be Christian. The law was not given for man to earn his way to heaven; the law was given for our good. The question is not: Do I have to go to church to be a Christian? Instead, we should ask, "When and why do I make time for God and his Word in my life?"

We go to church not just to follow a set of regulations that we must do to be good Christians. We worship in order to be reminded of our sins and to be assured of our forgiveness through Jesus. We worship in order to be encouraged in our faith and to encourage others in their faith. Attending church is something we want to do out of love for our Savior and for our own good.

When worship becomes about rules and laws that have to be obeyed, it's easy to take our eyes off God. The focus changes to what we are doing and how we are doing it. Let's not forget that God is almighty and all-knowing. He is the Creator through whose Word everything came to be. He needs nothing from us. With that in mind, it becomes clear that worship is not about what we do for God.

Worship is all about what God does for us. Worship is about recognizing our great need before God. It's about coming to him in humility for healing and restoration. *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* On the day of worship, we come to the place where forgiveness flows freely. We come to a place where our confessed brokenness and sinfulness is changed by the cross of Jesus into righteousness before God. We come to a place where the resurrected Savior offers hope to us sinners. We come to a place where we are served by Jesus through his Word, where we are filled by God so that we can honor him with our lives. God made this time for you. May we use it for our good and his glory.

The Pharisees didn't understand the purpose of the law and they didn't understand who Jesus was. *So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.* As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus understood better the purpose of the Sabbath. The purpose of the Sabbath law was to point to Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." (Colossians 2:16-17) If you are standing by the corner of a building and you see a shadow on the ground, the shadow indicates that there is someone around the corner. The Sabbath law was just such a shadow. It pointed to Christ and the rest he would bring. Now that Christ has come, the shadow no longer serves its purpose.

Sabbath means rest. In Genesis we are told, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:2-3) That sounds strange to our ears – God rested. He doesn't need rest. What that means is that God ceased his creative activity, then he stood back and admired the beauty and goodness of everything he had created. So the seventh day was originally intended to be a day to rest and reflect on all God has done to bless us.

What rest do we need most of all? We need rest from the burden of sin and guilt that weighs us down and threatens our eternity. We need the rest that only Jesus Christ can bring us through his suffering and death. We find that rest in the gospel of God's Word and sacrament. We find that rest in worship.

When God urges us to worship, it's like receiving a standing invitation to a Friday night banquet a rich uncle always puts on. We would go to such an event, not because we feel obligated to, but because we know we'll have great food and good fun. We would be crazy not to go! We come to worship with the same attitude, knowing that we receive the gospel in Word and sacrament and we find rest for our souls.

Some people think that our Lutheran worship is too passive. We just sit there. We listen to Scripture and sermon. We speak the same words of the liturgy and sing hymns. But there is good reason why we worship as we do. Worship is not about how excited we can become or how loud we can sing or how high we can lift our hands in praise. It's about what God does and effects through worship. It's about receiving from him rest, forgiveness and life.

Worship is not about rules and regulations. It's not about what we are doing for God. God made this time for you. Let's use it to grow in faith.