

Sermon for Trinity 17 – Luke 14:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

It was a Sabbath day and our Lord was at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. A man in need of healing comes before Jesus. In a one-sided conversation our Lord asks if it's lawful to heal him, then He heals him, and then tells the Pharisees why He healed him. And this was on a Sabbath day. Why was it controversial for our Lord to heal a man on the Sabbath day? What even is the Sabbath and why is it important to us?

God gave us the third commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." In Old Testament times, these words forbid working on Saturday. When God gave this commandment to the children of Israel, He wanted them to take a day off of work so that they would have time and opportunity to hear God's Word and to worship God together as His people.

God explained to them why they could not work on Saturday. God Himself rested on Saturday from His work in creating the world. When God's people rested on that same day, they were confessing their faith in their Creator who had called them out of slavery in Egypt into the freedom that belongs to the children of God. They were confessing their faith in the one true God as they were rejecting the gods of Gentiles and idols. They were also receiving spiritual rest and peace. When they rested from their labors, this served the higher purpose of finding rest for their souls in the gracious promises of God. God chose the day of rest for Israel. It was to be Saturday, not Wednesday or Sunday, but Saturday. God said it and that settled it.

One heterodox church body called the Seventh Day Adventists say that God demands Christians to set aside Saturday as the day of rest and worship. They insist that the seventh-day Sabbath is a part of God's moral law. But they are wrong. God's moral law is not time-bound in any way, but applies to all people of all times equally. The command that worship and rest from labor must be on Saturday (or any other day for that matter) is not part of God's moral law, for our Lord says through the Apostle Paul, "Therefore let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (Col. 2:16-17)

That being said, a Sabbath day, a time set aside to rest and receive God's Word tells us this necessary truth: we cannot gain heaven by any amount of spiritual labor, striving, or struggling. We are saved by God's grace alone. Christ does the work. We don't. God says again through His Apostle: "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." (Rom. 4:5) There can be no true spiritual rest or peace except that which Jesus Christ provides. He is our Sabbath rest.

We need Christ to have rest and peace. He has chosen to be with us whenever and wherever His Gospel is preached and His sacraments are rightly administered. Christ stood before His disciples that first Easter and showed the wounds from His crucifixion, and said, "Peace be with you!" His ministry of forgiving sinners continued on through the disciples, yet in truth, it's still Jesus who preaches, it's still Jesus who forgives, it's still Jesus who gives us life, it's still Jesus who gives us peace, it's still Jesus who gives us rest.

Dr. Luther explained the Sabbath Day like this: "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." We remember

the Sabbath Day in our times, not by resting from our labors on Saturday, but by holding the preaching of God's Word as a precious thing, the most precious thing we could receive from God in this life. Obeying the Third Commandment deals with much more than where you happen to be on a Sunday morning; it deals with how you regard God's Word. Do you despise it and think that it is an ordinary or even a boring or useless thing? Do you think that you can live without hearing the voice of your Good Shepherd? Do you think that if you hear Christ's gospel just once in a while and not regularly, that you won't stray and become lost? God's Word gives Christ's doing and Christ's dying to you. He finds you in your sin and covers you with His spotless righteousness. He covers your shame. He covers your failure. He covers your guilt. We need this Gospel. This is why God gave us the Sabbath Day: so that we may receive what Christ wants to give.

God has made no law that the church must worship on Sundays. The church has no authority to require what God's Word does not, but God does require us to hear His Word. Since the first century, Christians have gathered together on the first day of the week for God's divine service. In the weeks after His Resurrection, Christ appeared directly to followers on Sundays. Whether it was Mary Magdalene, His disciples, or the men on the road to Emmaus, every Sunday was another appearance of the risen Savior to His people. He told them, "Don't cling to me." They recognized Him in the breaking of the bread. He was preparing them for His on-going ministry today: simple water, used by His command and joined to His saving Word; that same Word preached by His ministers; that Word under the forms of bread and wine that is His body nailed to the cross and His blood flowing from His wounds. Wherever these gifts are, Christ is present for us. We come to church to find Jesus. And here He is.

There was a time when Sunday was honored as a day of rest for the sake of those who went to church on Sundays. Years ago Sunday morning belonged to the church. Times have changed. Everything under the sun competes with church, even on a Sunday morning. Buying, selling, soccer, football, working, driving to the lake, or just plain sleeping in because it's the only day that can be done. All these come before God's Word and singing praises to Him.

But why not seek true rest? Why not put aside the normal for the extraordinary? Dr. Luther summarized the 3rd commandment for us in marvelous way in His hymn about the Ten Commandments called, "These are the Holy Ten Commands." "You shall observe the worship day, that peace may fill your home and pray, and put aside the work you do, so that God may work in you. Have mercy, Lord."

Right now at the divine service, we are in heaven on earth. Right now, Christ is present for us sinners forgiving our sins. Right now, He is loving us in the most direct way He's chosen for His name's sake. His works, not ours. You are forgiven on account of His holy precious blood shed for you. Christ labored for you by bearing your sins in His own body. For His sake, God promises you eternal peace and rest in heaven. That's where your true Sabbath rest will be.

Our Lord said, "Come unto me you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." Christ brings heaven to earth. We come to the church to find Him, our Shepherd. He is our true Sabbath rest. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠