

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 6, 2021  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Mark 2:23-28

### **Lord of the Sabbath**

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have moved from the festival half of the church year into the non festival half. The festival half of the church year begins with Advent and ends with Trinity Sunday. It is called the festival half of the church year because it contains the major festivals of Christianity – Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. Now we are in the Sundays after Pentecost and we call it the non festival half of the church year because there are no major festivals. During this time we follow the life and teaching of Jesus, usually reading large sections of one of the Gospels throughout the summer and fall. This summer we are in the Gospel of Mark.

In the first five readings from Mark we see that Jesus is Lord. He is the master, the owner, the Lord over many things. Today we see him as Lord of the Sabbath. Hear again the Word of God from the Gospel of Mark.

#### **Mark 2:23–28 (NIV84)**

*One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” <sup>25</sup> He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

#### **Christ the Lord Keeps the Sabbath for Us**

Very early in Christ’s public ministry the Pharisees are trying to discredit him. They are not yet bold enough to confront and attack Jesus directly. Instead they attack the actions of the disciples of Jesus. If they can show that the disciples are willingly and openly breaking God’s laws, then what kind of teacher is Jesus? How could Jesus be a good teacher, much less the Messiah, if he allows his followers to sin in such an open way?

The Pharisees may have thought they were being sneaky in questioning the disciples’ actions instead of Jesus. But Jesus sees through them. A parent could see through a similar situation easily too. Let’s say that the parent has allowed their children to have a snack at 4 pm. A visitor to the house might question them, saying, “Is it good for the children to ruin their appetite before supper?” What is the visitor challenging – the choice of the child to eat soon before the meal or the choice of the parent to allow it? The question is really an accusation that the parent is a bad parent.

The Pharisees accuse Jesus of not understanding and enforcing the law of the Sabbath which is the Third Commandment. God explained the Sabbath Day in Leviticus 23:3, “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.” So there are two purposes for the Sabbath. First it is a day of physical rest. Second, it is a day of spiritual rest, a day of

sacred assembly. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He is the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, the God who gave Moses the Commandments on Mount Sinai. Jesus made the Sabbath laws and therefore knows them better than any of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees added to God's law. The disciples were in violation of the Pharisees' laws for the Sabbath. They were harvesting a field and threshing the grain. "That is work!" exclaims the tattletale Pharisees. The Pharisees excelled in pointing out the faults of others even by enforcing laws God never made. It is an easy way to make one feel better about oneself. "Look, Jesus! That person skipped church again....Look, Jesus! That person fell asleep in church again....Look, Jesus! My neighbor is just getting up when we got home from church....Look, Jesus! I'm keeping the Third Commandment better than most other people."

Friends, beware of the little Pharisee in each of us that tries to discredit others and make ourselves look good. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He knew the hearts of the Pharisees and he knows ours too. To truly keep the Sabbath we turn to the Lord of the Sabbath in repentance and beg his forgiveness.

And the Lord of the Sabbath fulfills the purpose of the Sabbath for us. Jesus gave people physical and spiritual rest. Think of the many he healed of various diseases and the many from whom he cast out demons. Jesus even did some of these on Saturday, the Sabbath day. He gave real, physical rest to those tormented by disease and the devil. In addition and more importantly he gives spiritual rest to all who are tormented by sin.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and was born to keep the Sabbath for us. There can be no true rest for sinners without the forgiveness of sins. There can be no sacred assembly before the Lord unless those gathered are cleansed of sin. The blood of Jesus shed on the cross cleanses us from sin so that we may gladly gather in sacred assembly before our God. The payment Jesus made for us, his suffering and death, more than pay for our sins, even our sins of judgment and condemnation of others to make ourselves look good. The Lord of the Sabbath gives true spiritual rest. You are forgiven. You are cleansed. You can gather before your God.

### **Christ the Lord Gives the Sabbath to Us**

And gathered before God as his forgiven children, the Sabbath can now be seen for what God meant it to be. Christ the Lord gives the Sabbath to us as a gift for our good. Jesus says, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*"

In the Pharisaical way of thinking, man was made for the Sabbath. They had a whole system of laws added to the simple Third Commandment so one could easily keep score of how each person was doing. If you walked too far or picked some food along a path to eat, you were losing points. In their way of thinking God made some rules and put mankind on the earth to see who would keep the rules the best. Those who do the best receive the prize of either a good life on earth or even eternal life in heaven. The Lord of the Sabbath turns their thinking upside down.

God did not make rules and put mankind on earth to keep the rules. God created mankind and blessed them. Even when the first humans broke the one command God gave them, he blessed them with the promise of a Savior. The Ten Commandments, which include the Sabbath commandment, are given only after the Lord delivers his people from slavery and oppression in Egypt. God did not give them the Commandments in order to enslave them to a new set of rules. The Commandments were to be a blessing to God's people.

Of course, the law always accuses. God's commands always point out our sin and our constant

need for a Savior. But we have a Savior. We rejoice to trust in Christ and in our new self, the commandments are a blessing to us. The Lord of the Sabbath gave the Sabbath to us as a gift to bless us.

Remember that the Sabbath is about rest for the body and rest for the soul. So it is good for us to take a day of rest once in a while. Don't work all day, every day of the week. It is good to do something different for a day to give your brain and body rest. The Lord of the Sabbath created us humans and Jesus is a true human. He knows what is good for us – periodic rest for the body.

It is the rest for our souls we have more trouble with. Our old nature within will see the Third Commandment as a burden to gather in church around God's Word and Sacraments in sacred assembly. How many times do I have to be in church each year for it to count as keeping the Third Commandment? How long is this service going to take? These are the questions of our sinful nature.

The Lord of the Sabbath gives us gifts when we gather for sacred assembly. He gives forgiveness, encouragement, hope, peace, strength, and faith as we gather to hear his Word and receive Holy Communion. These are blessings. It is your birthday or Christmas or graduation and there is a pile of cards and gifts for you. Would you ever open one and then tell everyone, "That's enough. You can take your gifts back. I don't want or need any other gifts." That would be strange and an insult to those who freely brought you gifts.

Jesus freely offers spiritual rest through the forgiveness of sins which brings us hope and peace and joy and all kinds of spiritual gifts. In our new self, we can only say thank you again and again. We delight to receive the gifts Jesus gives, not only on the day we set aside each week to gather together but on other days as well. Put those earbuds in and listen to an audio Bible while you exercise. Listen to or read the daily devotion or Bible readings through the WEL.net website or app. Find some good Christian music to fill your mind with and heart with Christ's words and promises. The choirs at Martin Luther College, Bethany Lutheran College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have great music. Koine and Branches Band sing many of our favorite hymns. Open your Bible, your hymnal and the Meditations booklet to hear the Lord of the Sabbath encourage you with his promises of forgiveness and hope and eternal life.

Jesus is the Lord of lords. He is the master and ruler of all things. And yet Christ is not like any lord of this earth. The lords and masters of this world take from their subjects. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives. The next four Sundays we will see how Christ is Lord in different areas, but today we joyfully receive the spiritual rest he gives by being the Lord of the Sabbath.

Amen.