

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Sabbath"

Scripture: Luke 6:1-16

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January 31, 2020

Theme: Sabbath is about human health and wholeness

Songs/Hymns: Dear Father, Lord of humankind 451 Repton (1,3,5), Take time to be holy 638, Sing, sing, sing (Tomlin)

If you've been following the news,
 You'll notice that some churches
 Have been in the media spotlight.

Some Christian communities are defying
 BC's COVID-19 health order prohibiting mass gatherings.
 Some are challenging the government in court.

A news article from earlier this month reported:
 "Kelowna Harvest Fellowship pastor Heather Lucier
 said her congregation gathered at the Harvey Ave., church...
 but declined to say how many people
 were physically in attendance.

"We know it's our charter constitutional right
 to gather and to worship,"
 she told Global News.""

Now whether you see these actions as endangering others
 or as a legitimate exercise of religious freedom.
 Whatever your opinion,
 These actions raise some important questions
 For everyone.

Questions about rights *and* responsibilities
 In Canadian society.

Questions about the value we give to spirituality
 the value we give to health
 and the value we give to economics
 in our land.

For Christians these actions raise particular questions
 About worship.

Does worship require you to sit in a pew
 With others on Sunday morning.
 Can you worship
 In front of a tv wearing only

Slippers and a bathrobe.

The nature of worship has been
 A long historic discussion within the church
 And before the church, within the synagogue.

Today's lesson from the Gospel of Luke
 Is part of this discussion.
 Today's lesson contains not one,
 But two Sabbath controversies.

Now when it came to Jesus' day
 A big part of worship
 Was observing the Sabbath.

What is the fourth commandment?
 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."ⁱⁱ

And how do you keep the Sabbath holy?
 You do not work.

As it is stated in Exodus chapter 4:
 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work,
 neither you, nor your son or daughter,
 nor your male or female servant,

nor your animals,
 nor any foreigner residing in your towns."

You worship by keeping the Sabbath holy,
 By refraining from work.

In Old Testament Scripture the Sabbath is observed
 For both theological and practical reasons.

In the Ten Commandments
 as given in the book of Exodus we are told that:

"in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth,
 the sea, and all that is in them,
 but he rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day
 and made it holy."ⁱⁱⁱ

In the book of Exodus

The people of Israel are invited
to share in God's divine life
By resting from their week of creating.

In the Ten Commandments as they are repeated
in the book of Deuteronomy

we are given another reason
for observing the Sabbath:

The people of Israel are invited to:

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt
and that the Lord your God brought you out of there
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you
to observe the Sabbath day."^{iv}

For the people of Israel in ancient times
And in Jesus' day, observing the Sabbath
Was a central part of their worship.

It was about imitating their God,
And celebrating their freedom.

Of course, over time, questions were raised
Over which activities were considered rest
And which activities were considered labor.

Eventually there was a consensus about 39 categories of work
That were prohibited by the law.

Rabbi and Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel
explains that prohibitions applied to:

"all those acts which were necessary
for the construction and furnishing
of the Sanctuary in the desert."^v

As is noted in Rabbinic teaching:

"They sowed in order to grow dyes for the Tabernacle...
therefore you may not sow on Shabbat.
They reaped, and therefore you may not reap on Shabbat."^{vi}

Which brings us to today's lesson.

In today's lesson the Pharisees ask Jesus
Why his disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

The disciples had been plucking grain
and eating the kernels as they travelled.

The problem wasn't that they were stealing,
as it was legal
To eat from a field while travelling.

The problem was that the Pharisees saw their actions
To be the equivalent of harvesting and threshing.^{vii}

Jesus counters their criticism,
with a story about David and his companions
Eating consecrated bread when hungry.

Jesus goes back to first principles
To argue that human flourishing trumps ritual observance
when it comes to God's law about the Sabbath.

Now it is was one thing to compare himself to David,
But Jesus takes it one step further.

Not only does Jesus declare his disciples' activity
Lawful as based on their need,
But he declares that he has the authority
To make this judgment:

"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."^{viii}

But this is only one of a number of Sabbath controversies
In Luke's gospel.

Luke immediately moves on to another story.

This time Jesus is in the synagogue and is teaching
And sees a man with a deformed right hand.

You should know that Rabbinic teaching
doesn't explicitly rule out
Works of healing on the Sabbath.

In fact "tradition did allow
for the superseding of strict Sabbath observance
in order to save a life"^{ix}

But if those Pharisees watching Jesus
could see the work of harvesting
in the disciples chewing on some grains,

It is clear that they could also imagine
 That the undoing of a disability
 Was a work that should be accomplished another day.

Jesus knew the Pharisees were waiting for an opportunity
 To trip him up and accuse him.

But he saw this day as an opportunity to restore life
 To a man who had been disabled
 And an opportunity to correct their distorted views
 About worship.

Once again Jesus challenges the Pharisees
 and the religious teachers on their principles.

“Is the Sabbath day, a day for doing good or doing evil” Jesus asks them.
 And then to highlight his own answer, he heals the man.

As one commentator notes:
 “The message is clear:
 it is never the wrong day to help another,
 to minister to human need.”

So from these two stories what can we learn
 From Jesus about worship?

A few things stand out.

First of all
 It shouldn’t be taken for granted
 That Jesus endorsed Sabbath-keeping.

Jesus acknowledged that it is part of God’s design
 That we would all have regular time
 for physical and spiritual refreshment.

Secondly we are reminded
 That the observation of the Sabbath as an act of worship
 Should enhance life and not detract from it.

Sabbath observance is not about our own righteousness
 But about God’s desire for human flourishing.

Thirdly it is important not to confuse Sabbath observance
 With the totality of worship.

Remembering keeping the Sabbath

was just one of the Ten Commandments.

Taking a weekly break is just one of the many ways
we are called to love God and our neighbors.
Those activities run through the rest of the week.

Finally we should recognise
That Jesus is the one who redefines our worship.
Jesus is the arbitrator when it comes
To how we approach and do not approach God.

When we are uncertain how to behave,
we can find direction in Jesus' actions
and Jesus character.

So how about your worship
Is it defined by burdensome rules
Or does it promote the flourishing of you AND your neighbors.

How about your worship.
It is limited to a couple of activities
defined by your parents or culture
Or has it been informed and reshaped
According to the example of Christ?

PRAYER

ⁱ Shelby Thom "Coronavirus: Kelowna church says it will continue to defy health order, fight fines in court" January 10, 2021
<https://globalnews.ca/news/7567383/coronavirus-kelowna-church-says-it-will-continue-to-defy-health-order-fight-fines-in-court/>

ⁱⁱ Exodus 20:8 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 4:11 NIV

^{iv} Deuteronomy 5:15 NIV

^v Robbie Medwed "The Prohibitions (Melachot) of Shabbat" <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/85228.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} See Fred B. Craddock *Luke* 82

^{viii} Luke 6:5 NIV

^{ix} Andre Resner Jr. "Mark 2:23-3:6 *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 196

^x Fred B. Craddock *Luke* 82