

Pastor Shaun Arndt

June 6, 2021

Sermon Text: Mark 2:23-28

The Lord of the Sabbath

Grace and peace to you from Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus uses a special title for Himself: **The Lord of the Sabbath**. It's not nearly as well-known as some other titles we use: **Son of God, Savior,** or **King of Kings**. And yet, **The Lord of the Sabbath** is just as important and teaches us vital Bible truths.

The **Lord** part of the name is pretty obvious. It tells us that as God the Son, Jesus is the true and eternal God, the Maker and Master of all things. His authority is absolute and His Word is truth.

And He is **Lord of the Sabbath**, as in the Third Commandment, where God says: **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

Now **the Pharisees** considered themselves *masters*, experts, we could say *lords* of keeping the **Sabbath**, and so they were quick to accuse Jesus' disciples of wrong, and by implication, Jesus too. **"Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"**

The Pharisees were not upset that the **disciples** had been **picking heads of grain** and eating them. God's Old Testament law specifically permitted people to do just this in the book of Deuteronomy. The Pharisees were mad about *when* this happened, on the **Sabbath**.

Since our lesson focuses around the Sabbath, let's take a moment to review what the Third commandment, the Sabbath Day meant for Old Testament believers and what it means for us today.

Sabbath is the Hebrew word for **rest**. And like many of the commands God gave to Israel through Moses, the wording of the Third commandment is part ceremonial law,

that is, it had a purpose that was only for the Old Testament believers until the Savior completed His work.

That temporary part of the commandment said that Old Testament believers were to **rest**, they were to take a **rest** from their **regular work** on Saturday, the seventh day. This way they would have time to worship, to hear and learn and meditate on the promises of God. Physical rest made time for spiritual rest.

Do you see the message God is making with this? On the day you focus on the LORD you do not work, you **rest**. See how clearly the Lord was teaching that you are not saved by works or anything you do, but only by trusting in, resting your faith upon your Savior God. That means the **Sabbath** itself was a picture of Jesus and the **rest** He brings for our souls in the good news of forgiveness.

Just as we heard in our second lesson today, the **rest from regular** work on specific day of the week no longer applies to us, now Jesus has come. Just as we don't need to sacrifice a sheep in church to learn that Jesus is the **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29), so we no longer need to keep the one specific day of **rest**.

What God *does* still commands for us today is that we do make the time to receive **rest** for our souls in Christ. And Christ comes to us in His Word, in the gospel good news of forgiveness. That's why Luther explained the commandment this way in the Catechism: *We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.*

Back to the events of our lesson—Now Christ had not died and rose yet, so that ceremonial law portion of the Sabbath day which included physical rest was still in effect. So did the Pharisees have a point?

No! The disciples taking a snack from the field as they walked by was not their regular work and so it was not actually breaking the commandment, though it did run afoul of the manmade laws the Pharisees and rabbis had added to God's Word.

But Jesus doesn't even address that, but goes deeper to try to correct the Pharisees false ideas about God's laws. Christ **the true Lord of the Sabbath** says: **The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**

That is, the whole basis and reason for God's law is love in every way. God didn't give His commandments for His own good, but for *our good!*

The law serves the good purpose of giving His believing people a way to show love and respect for our Savior God and guiding us how to love our fellow human beings in the way God desires.

God's law serves a good purpose even when it condemns us and shows us our sin. You see, God never gave His law as a way to save, but rather to show our sins and our constant need for Jesus and the forgiveness He gives to us in the Gospel.

Since God gave the law for **mankind's** good, it would have been evil and unloving to let the disciples go hungry for the sake of a Ceremonial law that was designed to help people and not harm them.

And that brings us to the heart of the issue and the Pharisee's problem: a lack of love and a misuse of God's law. Rather than seeing God's laws given out of love for the purpose of loving God and neighbor, they wrongly viewed the commands as something they could actually keep as a way to earn God's favor.

They had no real love for God when they thought they were keeping the **Sabbath**, because they didn't see any need for God's saving love since they thought they could save themselves.

And missing out on God's love, they also missed the point about showing love, doing what is best for their fellow man. So with a sort of vindictive glee they said, **"Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"**

Now *even if* the disciples *had been* doing something wrong, this attitude would not be a good way to win them over to God's truth! It wasn't love for God or others, but love for themselves that made them happy to condemn, to make themselves seem better by looking down on others.

And that's where we can start to see ourselves in this lesson. Oh we may not be running around in grain fields yelling for no reason at people grabbing a snack. But hasn't it happened to you?

That as we hear about the Pharisees' sins we a little voice inside wants to say: it's a good thing *I'm* not a Pharisee like them, *I know better, I know* I'm saved by grace. How easily we can forget that our faith in the truth is also an undeserved gift of God and we have no reason to boast (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9)!

But there remains a little Pharisee inside of us, in our sinful nature that always wants to think there is something *we have* to do or have done to earn God's favor, and it tries to prove that notion by thinking how much better we are than others!

It shows up in the way that we can make excuses for what we do, but are quick to condemn others. Sure, I was going over the speed limit a bit, but I had a reason, I had an important appointment. But when we see someone else do the same, we're quick to say 'That's just a reckless driver!' That's a subtle form of works righteousness, self-justification, just like the Pharisees, and we've been doing it since we were little kids pointing the finger at our brother or sister!

It can even happen when see the obvious evils and sins of our world that contradict God's Word and see people championing sin as something as wonderful. So we see abortion advocates, those who disregard what God says about gender and marriage and a whole host of other sinful action, and doesn't that sinful part of us cry out in our hearts, if not through our mouths or what we write on social media: ***Look, why are they doing what is not lawful...***

Now don't get me wrong. We can't remain silent about what is sinful. We must speak the truth, but we need to do it in *love!* If our reason to condemn it just to make ourselves feel better, it's just like the Pharisees. Instead the love God wants is that we would have a prayer for and a desire that those in the wrong and a desire that they would be brought to repentance and faith and be saved and changed by God's mercy the way He did for us!

Now, If you're a sinner like me, then even when my heart is filled with compassion for the disobedient the way God wants, still that sinful thought of look how better I am is still right there with me (cf. Romans 7).

And so just like the Pharisees we too have thoroughly shattered God's perfect law of love that stands behind his commands. And so it shows us just what a wearisome, tired, sinful mess we are.

And that means we need *rest*. We need relief and rescue from our sins and sinful attitudes. We need **the Lord of the Sabbath**.

Now do you see what a beautiful title **the Lord of the Sabbath** is! Remember, **Sabbath** means **Rest**. So **Jesus** is **the Lord of Rest**. The true **Rest-bringer**, who freely gives what we need! He is the **Lord of the Sabbath** who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life to save us. Jesus still comes to us through Word and Sacrament not just to tell us about rest, but to be our **Rest**, our rescue, our salvation!

Just be amazed at our God's goodness! Jesus knew our lost and sinful state and how we would still struggle with the **Pharisee** like attitudes of our sinful hearts and yet He came to save us anyway!

In your place and mine, Jesus was **Master** of the **Sabbath**, keeping it and every other commandment for all the right reasons—love for His Father, love for God's Word, love for his fellowman. Indeed, it was pure love that Jesus showed the Pharisees, not treating them the way they treated his disciples, but reaching out to the with God's Word that they might see their error and find **rest** in Him.

Indeed Jesus loved so perfectly and completely that to save us He who is **Lord of the Sabbath** and the giver of the law would give His life on the cross to pay for our sins and win us an eternal **Sabbath rest**. Risen from death, Jesus gives His people an everlasting **Sabbath** rest in heaven, forever free from sorrow, trouble, grief and death.

And then, this loving Jesus, **the Lord of the Sabbath**, Himself comes to serve us as we gather in Worship to hear and learn His Word and as we read our Bibles at Home. May we ever view our time in His Word not as 'one more thing to do,' but as a blessed time of **rest** and refreshment, where Jesus comes to do something for us, where He serves us (that's why it's called a worship service – He serves us with His promises) and gives us true and eternal **rest**. Amen.

*Jesus, says: Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.
Amen.*

Sun: Please be seated. If you haven't had a chance to fill out a connection card yet we ask that you might do that now and then place the completed card in the basket on your way out.

We hear the musical interlude.

Mon: We confess our Christian faith using the Apostles' Creed on p. 41.