

The Sabbath is a time of spiritual rest - Mark 2:27-28

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together". Amen

Out text for meditation for this Second Sunday after Pentecost is from the gospel of Mark 2:27-28. Let us hear one more time these two verses: "Then Jesus said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Here ends the text for meditation.

Dear friends in Christ:

Now in Canada nearly all retail stores are open every day of the week. Yes, retail stores, banks, groceries, among others are open on Sunday. So Sunday is now a regular day for work. Personally I am opposed to this system based on the teachings of God's word. Our Lord says in His Word that we need a day of rest "a Sabbath day" to refresh ourselves both physically and spiritually. We need time for ourselves and time for God. And that is really the point of this sermon to remind ourselves of how special a day Sunday can be for us.

It is a day that can and should provide us with time to relax and enjoy ourselves. It is also a day that can and should provide us with time to spend in special thanksgiving and worship of our wonderful, loving God. Maybe there are many people who no longer think of Sunday as anything special and in itself the day is not better than any other day. But it can, and should, be something special to God's people because here is a day that was made just for us to provide us with time for ourselves and time for God.

One of the psalmists said "**This is the day which the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.**" That can be said about each and every day, for every day that we have here on this earth is a gift of God, and should be dedicated to Him. But that verse takes on special meaning when we begin to talk about the Sabbath day, which for us means Sunday. After all, God gave the Sabbath as a day of blessing for man.

The word Sabbath means rest - and that is one of the main reasons for God giving us a Sabbath day, that we might enjoy physical rest.

In the Old Testament lesson today we heard God tell His people: <sup>12</sup> "**Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.** <sup>13</sup> **Six days you shall labor and do all your work,** <sup>14</sup> **but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.**"

God did not create us to be machines. We were not designed to be on the go all the time. We need time to rest. And so God gave us a day - a Sabbath day in which we could put aside the hustle and bustle and the business of the week to relax and recuperate for the days ahead. But as so often happens, man complicates the simple, clear word of God. Before long the observance of the Sabbath, this day of blessing from God, became bogged down in a whole systems of manmade rules and regulations. In Jesus' day these regulations had been carried to the point of absurdity.

Several times the Pharisees accused Jesus of doing things considered unlawful on the Sabbath, such as healing the sick. Their point was that healing was doctoring, and doctoring was work - work that was forbidden on the Sabbath. The gospel lesson today is another example of that. The Pharisees complained that the disciples had been working on the Sabbath. They had been walking through a wheat field, and as they went along, they picked some heads of wheat. The fact that they picked the wheat was allowed under Jewish law, but the Pharisees were upset because they did this on the Sabbath. Picking was harvesting - obviously work. And in addition they would have had to rub the wheat between their hands to remove the chaff, which the Pharisees considered threshing - again an obvious form of work.

But Jesus meets their objections with a lesson from the Scriptures, and then reminds them of the real truth that they had been missing all along, as He says to them "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**"

That is a lesson that we all seem to miss in some way, shape or form. This day that we observe as our Sabbath is a day that God made for man's benefit. And while the Pharisees may have misunderstood the purpose and intent of the Sabbath, we are often no better. We, too, misuse the Sabbath when we make too much or too little of the special day God gives to us. He made this day so that we could have an opportunity for physical rest, but he also gives us this day so that we can attend to our spiritual needs.

When I was growing up I remember my grandma telling me that on Sundays I was not allowed to play, nor do any kind of work. But that is not what God intended for the Sabbath day. I find nothing in Scripture that would suggest that we cannot enjoy a Sunday walk in the park, or that we cannot spend the afternoon in our garden or cutting our grass. I cannot find anything that says we cannot go to the beach or to a movie on Sunday. But at the same time, I believe that God did not intend for man to spend this day in his normal activities and duties. The Sabbath is not a day to catch up on all the work you did not get done during the week. It is a day to enjoy life as a gift of God. It is a time for us. But it is just as importantly a time for God. This is one aspect of the Sabbath which should never be forgotten, and yet it is this very thing that is most often overlooked.

As much as we may need a time of physical rest and refreshment, we need a time of spiritual rest and refreshment even more. And that is what Sunday should be for us - a time of both physical and spiritual refreshment. And we get that spiritual refreshment when we make time and take time for God each Sunday. That means that yes, we can go to the beach or work in the garden, or do those things that we enjoy, so long as they are not sinful, but only to the extent that we have also made time for God in our Sabbath. Nothing stop us to worship our Lord and visit with friends or go to the cottage, or whatever. Nothing can keep us from being in church each and every Sunday morning. We need to hear God's word each week. We need time for worship and prayer, and we need time to join together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to praise and thank our loving heavenly Father together, and to encourage one another in our lives as His children.

But we do not seem to have that two fold emphasis on the Sabbath any more. We may have gotten away from the legalism of the Pharisees and have learned to enjoy our Sabbath day as a rest day, but I think we have forgotten to set it aside as a holy day to the Lord. There are so many excuses: we are on a team, and our games are on Sunday mornings. It is the only day that we get to sleep in each week. It is the only chance we have to travel or to visit. It is the only day that we have to cut the grass. Now all those things may be true but... is it not true that this is also one of the only opportunities we have each week to gather together around the word of God and receive from Him the strength, the encouragement and the spiritual nourishment that we really need for our lives?

This day was made for man and we should treasure it as our special day. But it is a day that is also made to give us time with God, and that should not be ignored. We should give careful thought to the fact that this is the Lord's Day, first and foremost and we should make use of it accordingly.

Yes, there are times when it is virtually impossible for us to join together in worship. If you have to work on Sunday, or if you or a relative is sick, you may not be able to be in church. But should a late Saturday party keep us from worship? Should sleeping in keep us from spending some much needed time with the Lord? Should our lives become so busy that we have no time for Him who is the source of our entire being?

Friends, God designated Saturday, the seventh day, to be the day of worship as a reminder of the love that God demonstrated through creation. We do not worship on Saturday anymore. We worship on Sunday. Do you know why? Well, Sunday is the day that Jesus rose from the dead and how did God demonstrate His love for us? By raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection was the sign that God had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sin. Make no mistake about it, we are sinful creatures. Inside of our hearts is the natural inclination to despise God's Word and we see the evidence of that in our lives – through begrudging church attendance or prioritizing other things above the Word of God. For that sin we deserve death, but we do not get it, because we have a Redeemer – one who bought us back and paid for our sin.

Jesus Christ was perfect throughout his whole life, keeping all the Commandments perfectly. He went to the temple when He was 12 years old, but that's not the only thing He did. We hear of how Jesus worshipped publicly with other believers in the Temple and in the synagogue. He taught and learned, by attending Bible classes. The Word was always on His mind, in His heart and on His lips. Jesus kept this commandment perfectly, and He kept it for you, as your substitute.

Now we do not have to pay the penalty for our sin. Now every time you come to church and remember the Sabbath day, you are receiving God's blessing and the reminder of all that He is done for you. You hear from the Word of God the good news of your salvation and the promise of eternal life through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Amen

That the Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit pour out his richest blessings to all of us and fill us with peace.  
Amen