

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is your weekend going so far? Is it restful? My weekend is Friday to Saturday because I work on Sundays. Friday I spent much of the day repairing a wall in our family room that got water damaged from a leaking valve in the laundry room. So not very restful. And yesterday I ended up working because last week we took advantage of the Memorial Day holiday and my birthday on Tuesday to go down to visit my family in St. Louis. There was a party on Sunday evening for our step-niece who leaves today to serve in the Peace Corps in western Africa. On Monday we got to see Marian's new apartment and the new Star Wars movie. I spent a good portion of Monday and Tuesday working on our family tree with my parents, and we got to have homemade ice cream twice! It was a very relaxing and enjoyable couple of days. You could say that that was a kind of Sabbath for me and my family. You will have noticed by now that Sabbath is the theme of our readings this morning. We're in the post-Pentecost season now, when we consider, in light of Jesus death, resurrection, and ascension, and the sending of the H.S., how we now shall live — what life looks like on this side of the resurrection. There are three things I want to raise up from these readings. 1. Sabbath is a gift, 2. we have tendency to turn gifts into burdens, and 3. the Sabbath is for everyone and it's about justice.

1. The Sabbath is a gift. Our first reading this morning is from Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible. Deuteronomy is the Greek name for this book. It means "Second Law." It's called this because the first time law was given was back in Exodus as the Israelites were leaving Egypt. Now in Deuteronomy it's 40 years later and they're getting ready to enter the Promised Land. So Moses reminds them of God's law, God's instruction, to prepare them for their new life in their new home. Our reading is the entirety of the Third Commandment – remember the Sabbath and keep it holy (or special.) The Sabbath is to be a day of rest. No work is allowed. Why? Two reasons are given: First, because God rested on the seventh day after creating the world. If it's good enough for God, it's good enough for God's people. And second, because, Moses tells the people, "You were slaves." You know what it is like never to have a break. You were slaves, but you're not any more. God rescued you from the burden of slavery. So don't continue to live your lives as if you were still slaves.

2. We turn gifts into burdens. This first reading is the background to our Gospel text. We're back in Mark now after a long break for Lent and Easter, back to Jesus bringing the "reign of God" near. This Gospel reading is about the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over keeping the Sabbath. The Pharisees were very strict in their moral and ritual practices. They had rules for what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. You could only walk so far. You couldn't harvest or prepare food. So when they see Jesus' disciples plucking grain and eating it, they accuse Jesus of not being a proper follower of God's law. (Now I want you to remember my rule about Pharisees: If you read a story that has Pharisees in it and you don't identify yourself with the Pharisees, you're probably missing the point.)

The Pharisees' operating principle is what they do for God is what really matters. The better and more strictly they follow the Law, the more they are made right with God. And don't we fall into that same way of thinking, even we good Lutherans who should know better? We divide the world into good people and bad people. Some deserve help when they need it, and others don't. This attitude showed up in a news story I caught this past week of some legislator who wants to defund prison education programs. He doesn't think it's right that someone should be able to earn a college degree at the public's expense while in prison, even though studies clearly show that those who

receive an education in such programs are far less likely than those who don't to end up back in prison. The attitude seems to be that prisoners are bad people. They should be punished, not helped.

The Pharisees are proud to be among the "good people" who do what God requires, and they look down on those who don't keep the law like they do. But Jesus tells the Pharisees that they've got it backwards. The law, particularly this law, was meant as a gift, not a burden. It was meant to relieve burdens, not add more. It's not just a rule they can use as a weapon against others.

That brings us to our third point:

3. Sabbaths is for everyone, and it's about justice. The Sabbath law isn't just a matter of personal piety. In other words, it's not just about you as an individual and your private religious practice. Sabbath is for everyone, and it's about justice. Moses is as clear as he can be about this. Sabbath is not just to give *you* a break. It's also for your children and your animals. And it's for resident aliens! Immigrants, migrants, and refugees fall into this category. And its for your slaves, those whose labor you benefit from. Everyone needs a break from work. Everyone. Remember you were slaves! You were foreigners! And the only reason you're not still slaves and foreigners is because God had mercy on you and rescued you. So you also need to show mercy.

In the United States we have laws about how many hours a person can work at a job. We have 8-hour days and 40-hour weeks. That's good. But we don't ensure that all jobs pay a living wage, and we don't have laws that stop people from working multiple jobs. There are many people who have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet because a single full-time job isn't enough. They're not getting a Sabbath. Or a break.

The question before us throughout the post-Pentecost season is, "How shall we as Christians live in light of the resurrection? – in the light of our own salvation by the grace of God?" Today we ask, how shall we live in light of God's intent for all to have Sabbath rest? Shall we not seek a society where all who work also have rest from their work? If it's good for us, isn't it good for all?

I'm glad we're finally back to Mark today, back in his drama of Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God, God's reign. In God's reign things are meant to be different from the way the world has been working. Because the way the world has been working is oppressive, and dysfunctional, and hopeless for so many. If we're not experiencing it that way for ourselves that just means that we are the fortunate ones, the ones for whom the world as it is works just fine. And so we might not really want to change. We might not want to pay more for our fast food. Or our lawn care. Or our cool tech gadgets that are made abroad by cheap labor in countries where even the good labor laws we do have don't exist. If that describes us, then that makes us part of the problem. And we might be inclined to resist anyone would advocate for change – like those Pharisees who went off and looked for a way to have Jesus killed.

I'm not an economist. And I'm not here to tell you what to do. I may be looking at things all wrong when it comes to practical solutions for the problems we face. But I am here to say that the Jesus who liberated us from the power of sin, death, and evil by his death and resurrection, and who claimed us as his own in Holy Baptism, calls us to repentance – to a change of heart and mind. To think not just about what is best for us, but what is best for all people in our community, our nation, and our world. And to have mercy, just as we have been shown mercy by God. How will we respond to that call today? This week? This year? I hope by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, which will create faith in us that trusts God's promise of life in Jesus Christ enough to move us to shake us out of our selfishness and into meaningful action on behalf of those who most need mercy. May that grace be ours, and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.