

May 22nd, 2022

Sermon: What Would Jesus Say Now that Sunday is Just Another Day by Pastor Jenn

There are a number of you here today that remember the blue laws the idea that the Sabbath is to be kept holy so certain rules of what you could and could not do on this day were enforced. The name blue laws was given because they originally would be listed on blue paper. I couldn't find a picture of one, but I did find a picture of this, an ad encouraging people to vote no to Sunday movies in 1947. It says **"Sunday movies desecrate the Lord's Day. Sunday movies disobey God's law. Sunday movies obstruct the work of the church". And then it says "So does communism". So what are you going to do? "Vote no on Sunday movies" sponsored by the Greater Norristown Council of Churches.**

Times have changed, but today we are going to look at the idea of keeping a Sabbath. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shavat*, which means to rest with God. For Christians the day of rest with God has been Sunday, when Jesus rose from the grave. So today we are going to consider this question of discipleship: **What Would Jesus Say Now that Sunday is Just Another Day?** What I mean by that is it's not just a day for worship, it's now become a day like any other day in the week, a day that keeps us busy and possibly uncentered.

According to the Reachright Podcast who got these numbers from Barna Research, physical attendance for church worship post-Covid is about 36-66% of what it was pre-covid.¹ So less people are coming to church on Sundays. We'll consider what Jesus might have to say about that as we study this Lukan passage.

Now first off, you need to know that the Pharisees were keepers of the law and they had their concerns about Jesus. He was already spending time and even eating with outcasts, not to mention the crowds of people he drew. So the Pharisees were concerned because it appeared that Jesus was sweeping away rules and traditions that had been upheld for hundreds of years. One of those traditions was to not pick and eat grain on the Sabbath. This was considered work. And the Sabbath was not a day of work. When confronted with this, Jesus says, **"Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" 5 Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."** Jesus reminds them King David and his men, when defending Israel and the Lord, ate when they needed to, as will Jesus and his disciples, *because they too are doing the Lord's work.*

Then in this second story regarding the sabbath, we read of the presence of a man with a withered hand and the text says, **7 The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him.** The test is, will Jesus heal a man who obviously wasn't in physical damage and could wait to be healed the next day, rather than on the Sabbath. The text says Jesus knows they are thinking this, so he says to the Pharisees, **V 9 "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?"** Jesus offers this as a learning moment- ultimately if actions are done that lead to helping others, feeding them, healing them, this is good and this, Jesus claims is welcome on the sabbath. However the Pharisees and scribes and their condemnation were not honoring God's will of goodness over evil. They were seeking to destroy Jesus on the sabbath, while he was seeking to heal.

This is what Jesus is getting at: The Sabbath is not defined as what one should not do, but in terms of what one can do for the good of self and others. Sabbath is about connecting with God's will.

Let's look at Why did God implement a time of Sabbath? If we go to the beginning, in Genesis we learn that after six days of creating and blessing, we read what God does next, **2² And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested (ceased) on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [as His own, that is, set it apart as holy from other days], because in it He rested from all His work which He had created and done. God blessed the seventh day to be set apart as a time of rest from the creation work.**

And then in Exodus 20 we read how God commanded the Israelites to rest on the Sabbath, like God rested on that first seventh day and keep it holy. **8 "Remember the Sabbath (seventh) day to keep it holy (set**

apart, dedicated to God). ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath [a day of rest dedicated] to the Lord your God; on that day you shall not do any work,...¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested (ceased) on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy [that is, set it apart for His purposes]. To keep the Sabbath is to keep focused on God's purposes, it is a time to put all things into the care of God. It is to center oneself emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

In Wayne Muller's *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* he writes that the Sabbath was given as a gift not a duty. It is given to "maintain a spiritual ground" p. 8 He writes, "If you work all week and forget to rest, you will become brittle and hard, and lose precious nourishment and joy. ... If we forget to rest we will forget those we love, forget our children and our natural wonder. God says: Please, don't. So I give you this commandment: Remember to rest. This is not a life-style suggestion, but a commandment—as important as not stealing, not murdering, or not lying. Remember to play and bless and eat with those you love, and take comfort, easy and long, in this gift of sacred rest." Sounds wonderful doesn't it? God wants us to rest, to love, to play even! But for so long the perception has been you have to go to church on Sunday. It's in the commandments, it's a rule. I wonder if maybe we would explain that going to church is not about checking off a list of what you do and do not do as a Christian, but rather as a way to find rest and be rejuvenated, would more people attend? Seems to me we all seek some solace at times. Do we realize that is what the Sabbath is about? Jesus certainly took part in it and invited others to do the same.

Think about when Jesus says this in **Matthew 11:28-29** ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus offered rest as nourishing and essential. He also portrayed it. Remember those times when Jesus would often send people away, or disappear without warning, dismissing those in need with neither excuse nor explanation, and retreat to a place of rest. **Matthew 14:23** ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, **Luke 5:15-15** ¹⁵ Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Notice how Jesus did not wait until everyone had been properly cared for, until all who sought him were healed. He didn't ask permission to go, nor did he let his disciples know where he was going. He would simply stop, retire to a quiet place, and pray.

Friends, to look at Sunday as just another day, is to miss out on the gift God has given us: to put to rest all that is going in our lives, and be present with the living God to nourish us and revive us through scripture, through songs, through worship.

I like the way Isaiah writes of it: **Isaiah 58:13-14** ¹³ "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the Lord"

Saying that, there is this statistic too, 65% churchgoers watch their service online². Which means we may have to face the fact that Sunday can't be the day of Sabbath for all. Some may work, some may travel. In Bloomsburg there was a church that started a Monday night worship service because so many people traveled on the weekends to visit family outside of the area.

So as we look at this question, **What Would Jesus Say Now that Sunday is Just Another Day?** I think he would say this, **You are not made for the Sabbath; the Sabbath is made for you. —Mark 2:27** Meaning, if Sunday has become another day, then pick some other time for Sabbath. But keep it holy by finding rest, for such rest is to help us be fully human by connecting with God and one another.

And for those of us who can come Sunday mornings, receive this not as a duty, a requirement, but a gift, a gift of our creator God, loving Savior, and reviving Spirit. It is as Mueller writes, "a time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us." (p7).