

Series: Ten Commandments

Sermon: #4, Honor the Sabbath

Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 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. 11 For 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.

Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

Then he 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."

Rest Easy

One of those tried and true, across the board beliefs no matter what church you belong to, is in the Ten Commandments. Every denomination, every Sunday School, every Confirmation or CDC Class that we have today teaches The Ten Commandments. Somehow, the Ten Commandments have been worthy enough to receive our upmost attention as a Christian faith, whether you're Catholic, Protestant, or an undecided voter. We all believe in the Ten Commandments. We can all picture the tablets coming down off of the mountain with Charlton Heston. The indisputable, not-negotiable laws and regulations as to how we are to live and act. Typically, they are not questioned. And today, we are continuing our look at the 10 Commandments by looking at Commandment number 4: You shall remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. You shall remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. The full Command reads as such: "Remember to keep the Sabbath holy. Work and get everything done during six days each week, but the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the Lord your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your sons or daughters, your male and female slaves, your animals, or the foreigners living in your cities. The reason is that in six days the Lord made everything - the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. On the seventh day he rested. So the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Its right there, in black and white. No work on the Sabbath. End of discussion. How many times I've told the Bishop that I want to be a better Christian, and I don't want to work on Sundays. And she responded that I don't have to work on Sundays. As a matter of fact, she told me that if I don't want to work on Sunday, I don't have to come in on Mondays either, or Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, for that matter. I think there was a hint there, I'm not sure.

Thou Shall Keep the Sabbath. This is the only Commandment out of the Ten that we give to ourselves creative licence to fudge. We give ourselves permission to break. We give ourselves an awareness that we really don't have to do it. No other requirement among the Ten Commandments is as controversial in churches today as this

one. We ask such questions as, “Is it okay for my daughter to play soccer on Sunday mornings?” “Am I breaking the Sabbath if I spend the afternoon catching up on business paperwork at home?” “Can I go out to eat tonight and pay someone else to work for me and let them break the commandment?” And each church responds differently. For the most part, if we’re concerned about it at all, we want to know the rules and regulations about what this or may not require of me. The Sabbath Do’s and the Don’ts. And how this will affect my daily living. And more and more often, there is a battle about what is permissible and what is acceptable.

There are two different extremes that we are fighting here. And like most issues, we agree with some or part of what each side is bantering for. The question on how we treat the Sabbath is no exception. The first extreme I’ll defend is one that I will call legalism. Legalism. Set in stone, we should treat the Sabbath as a holy day. As mentioned in the Ten Commandments, we are to rest on that day and treat it differently than the other six days. The Sabbath was created for us, for us to catch our breath from the previous week before we jump into the next one. And the legalist wants to know, what is permissible to do on the Sabbath, and what is not? Can we have our soccer game? Can we have a work day? Should I rake my lawn? Lets see what one of the scriptures say: When the Israelites were still in the desert, they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and all the people. They held the man under guard because they did not know what to do with him. Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely die.” So all the people took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded. Well, I think it’s pretty obvious what we should do. We all should pick up some rocks from the driveway and drive to the golf courses and malls where there might be some work or some play going on. What do you say? Again, we want to know specific laws for us to follow. Even Jesus got into trouble with the legalists of the day. So did King David. And we have in our American Tradition a set of Sabbath laws designed to do just that. Lawmakers in one of the New England colonies, in an effort to define which activities were and were not permitted on the Lord’s Day, published thirty-nine pages of regulations - all in very fine print. These are laws that some states and cities carry to this very day! They were printed on blue paper and because of such, they were known as blue laws. You do not see much of them today, but I’m sure that many of you can remember when they were in effect on a broader scale. Sunday was probably one of the longest days of the week. All businesses were closed. Stores weren’t open. Malls shut down. The only thing to do was to go to church, sit at home, have visitors over. The place or city just shut down for a day. Saturday, however, was a fun day with plenty of things to do and places to go. But Sunday, ugh. It wasn’t until the 1990’s that liquor stores in Oregon could be open on Sundays. City code in Yamhill outlaws any “occult arts,” meaning any action of astrology, fortune telling, clairvoyance, and so on, to attempt to tell the future, locate stolen property, give advice, and other actions. So hide the ouija board! In most major Nebraskan cities, you cannot purchase alcoholic beverages on Sundays until Noon. It used to be all day, but legislation changed to noon, assuming most churches would be out by then. There used to be restrictions on cards, on dancing, on sporting events, on pretty much everything. Many businesses were closed on Sundays. For the most part, drug stores were exempt from the blue laws because of possible emergency needs. Hence, drug stores made a nice tidy profit by selling other items such as groceries, office supplies, and housewares to take advantage of their exempt status. Hence, many drug stores carry such items today, although their competitors have since been allowed to sell on Sunday. This is the legalistic way of looking at the Sabbath. Having the form of Sabbath without requiring the worship or rest. You can’t make someone take the Sabbath to heart, but you sure could shut everything down so he or she couldn’t do anything if they wanted to.

The other extreme of looking at the Sabbath is just the opposite. No rules, no regulations, no blue laws, nothing on the outside that restricts us from doing anything, but having the spirit of Sabbath somewhere in our hearts. That we have a sense of a special day without needing to formalize it by stopping commerce or activity. This is where I think most of us are. We perceive that the legalistic way of Sabbath holding is an infringement on our personal liberty. Instead of having the whole day to rest and relax, to worship and to catch our breath, we keep

our frantic lifestyle - with the understanding that we somehow acknowledge our awareness that Sundays are special. The modern world, we argue, is too complex to set apart a whole day for rest and worship. There is too much that we need to do and too much that we want to do to give up one day in seven for God. We are just too busy. And we rationalize it by putting Sabbath somewhere in our hearts and we give a little nod to God saying "You and me, we're just fine". We can just fit God into our schedules the way we do piano lessons and dental appointments. The problem with this extreme is that there is little or no sacrifice required. The danger is that we carry on our lives as if Sunday wasn't somehow special or that it becomes my day instead of God's day. Where there is no difference a Saturday or a Sunday.

Those are the two extremes. And quite frankly, who am I to tell you what you should or shouldn't do on a Sunday? But I will share with you some insights that might get you to think how you spend your Sabbath.

I want you to have some sense of what the essence of Sabbath is, and why it was so important to the people of Moses. Imagine you're the people of Israel. You're marching. Through the wilderness, through the desert. If you're like me, you plod on, you keep on going till you drop. On family road trips, I drive and I drive and I drive, not wanting to stop for anything. If someone in the back has to stop, we keep on going, you have to use the bathroom? Here's a pop bottle. We keep driving! Until I feel that there is a small armed rebellion forming in the back seat. I don't like to rest. Moses was probably the same way. Lets go, lets go, lets go. Who needs rest? Who wants to stay on the road? Not me, lets go, lets go, lets go! And then the ten commandments came around and God told Moses, "Moses, stop the car for one day." Just stop and rest. Catch your breath. If you don't rest, you'll kill yourself and those with you - or they will kill you. Does that sound like your household? You go and go and go and go, never to catch your breath, and even when you do get a small break or vacation, you fill it with so much stuff and activity that you actually look forward to work so you can rest and relax! To those households, I say, Slow down! Take a moment to rest! Have a nice dinner together. Make Sunday lunch or dinner a mandatory event, at home, with no TV on, no phones, everyone around the table - enjoying each other's company. Put aside your concerns and troubles for a moment and refresh yourself. The Israelites didn't look upon the Sabbath as a legalistic setback, a day ruined by doing nothing. They just got out of slavery! They just got out of bondage, where they had to work day in and day out, no rest, no recovery, no days in which to enjoy and relax. The Sabbath probably seemed like heaven! A gift from God! Not meaning to be restrictive in activity, but a freedom from the things that enslave us. Do your Sunday's feel like freedom, or are they the same thing as every other day, more hassles, more stress, activity piled upon activity? It doesn't have to be that way. Are you a slave to your activities or to your children's calendar? Who controls who, who needs the rest? The Sabbath is a Holy Day. Holy Day. Its not surprising that the words holy and day have been combined to make the word Holiday. A holiday is a special time out of the ordinary. And we celebrate our holidays with gusto and fanfare. On the Fourth of July we blow things up and be patriotic. On Memorial Day we mourn those whom we lost. On Christmas we gather round a tree and share gifts and love. We celebrate our holidays. We celebrate our holy days. And Sunday is a holy day. A holiday given to us by God for our enjoyment and rest. How do you treat your Sundays? Is it somehow special or is it the same as Saturdays? The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew language. It means Pause. To take a pause. Do we take a pause to enjoy the life that God has given us? Do we take a pause to give thanks to God for this day of rest? Do we take a pause, do we offer up any kind of sacrifice or worship? Do we take the time to be with God, in a manner that is different than what we would normally do otherwise? I can't tell you how you need to practice the Sabbath. But I would plead with you that we need to take away activities that lead us away from worship. What keeps us away from worship? We need to take a pause and worship. And I'll tell you, it doesn't have to be Sunday morning worship. But I almost guarantee it, if you skip church in the morning, will we really take time out somewhere in the day, something outside our normal routine, and pay homage to our creator. I doubt it. I would have a hard time doing it. Would I let my kid skip church every week in favor of another routine activity, for something else? Not me. And I'm not mad at the YMCA's or the Little Leagues or the whoevers. They can have their activities on Sunday for all I care. They are free to do it. But I'm surprised at the number of parents who allow

it to go on. Those who think they have no choice but to keep on keeping on. That's what surprises me. Do we need the rest? If not on Sunday mornings, where are we going to find it? Do we need to worship? If not on Sundays, where and when are we going to do it? Do we need to pause, to free us from the things that enslave us? If not on Sunday mornings, when? The Sabbath was made for us, not us for the Sabbath. I think you'd agree - now more than ever, we need to pull the car over once a week to take a rest. To take a Sabbath. And the family of God said, Amen.