

PROPER 4B

PREACHED JUNE 3, 2018 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Deuteronomy 5.12-15; Mark 2.23 – 3.6

How many of you, on any given day, might say – if being brutally honest – that you are **exhausted**? The **cause** of the exhaustion could vary. Sometimes it's **physical** exhaustion from pain or disability or simply lack of sleep. Or it could be **emotional** exhaustion from carrying around worries and hurts and fears about the present or the future. Sometimes we are even exhausted **spiritually**, wondering whether God is really listening to our prayers or if God even exists.

In our 24/7,365 world, exhaustion is **common**, if not **prevalent**. We are constantly **bombarded** by sounds and messages and visual images, demands on our **time** and our **energy**, stimuli that keep our **brains** and our **bodies** engaged for **hours** upon hours until we fall, exhausted into bed at night (or, for some, in the day time) hoping that we can turn it all off and actually **sleep**.

What we need, my friends, is a good **Sabbath** – a day (at least) of rest, a day to turn off our brains and let our bodies and our minds be **still**. After all, if it was good enough – and **necessary** enough - for **God** following six days of creation, it should be the same for **us**.

So, speaking of Sabbath, today's Old Testament lesson outlines the 2nd commandment just as I remember it from my confirmation days:

"Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work -- you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day."

The Decalogue, or 10 Commandments, appears **twice** in scripture – here in Deuteronomy chapter 5, and again in **Exodus** chapter 20. While they are very **similar** in structure and language, there is one notable **word difference** in the commandment that we read today (#2 in our list). Exodus calls for Sabbath **remembrance**, since the day was consecrated at creation (God rested on the 7th day from his labors). But Deuteronomy calls for Sabbath **observing** "*so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were slave in the land of Egypt,*" the Jews were reminded.

I used to think that laws – particularly the 10 commandments – were **restrictive** and **punitive**. But in many respects they are just the **opposite**. They are **freeing**, because they provide for us a **framework** for our actions, our behavior, our speech and our thoughts. In order to live in society, humans need **structure**! Laws provide **ground rules** for behavior, and to the extent that they are **fair** and mutually

agreeable, they allow us to go about our daily routine with little incident. Knowing that a red light means we should stop (and do), we can all travel safely on the highways.

The **problem** comes when the law's **fairness** comes into question, when the **intent** of the law is not seen so **mutually**. Then we get the "my way or the highway" mentality or "that law doesn't apply to me," either permanently or at this point in time. And sometimes there **are legitimate** reasons for breaking the law, as in self-defense or breaking a law for the common good.

In today's **gospel** lesson, Jesus **challenges** the prevailing interpretation of what is lawful on the Sabbath. Did **David** break the law, Jesus asks, when he fed his companions on the Sabbath? Jesus says no. "*The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.*" And then Jesus himself enters the synagogue on the Sabbath, sees a man with a withered hand, and **heals** him. Jesus proffers that healing the man – just as David provided bread to the hungry – is work that **could not wait** until the next day.

Jesus contends that sometimes certain demands of the law are rightly **set aside** in favor of pursuing greater **values** or meeting greater **needs** - especially when those greater needs promote a person's well-being. Admittedly, the man was not **dying**, but his hand was withered, which was cause for a certain amount of **discomfort** and **disability**. With the restoration of his hand, the man's ability to work in the Galilean economy and to provide for his family was restored. Thus, Jesus' healing of the man's hand represents a restoration to wholeness and dignity.

So we see that Jesus was willing to "bend the rules" if you will, to do good on the Sabbath for the sake of the well-being of the man and his family. Because Sabbath - sabbath rest - is more than grabbing a well-needed nap. Sabbath is not just a break from routine, time out or time off for a job well done, or time to recoup. It's about rest and restoration and **centering** and refocusing ourselves and our lives once again on God.

Remember, this is a **commandment**, not a suggestion. Sabbath-keeping is not **optional**! If we are live fully and deeply in God and serve God faithfully, then observance of the Sabbath is crucial. And yes, we have many, many excuses for why we **can't**, but they are just that – excuses.

It's hard work to share the kingdom of God, to love God and love neighbor and work to bring peace and justice and equality for all people. So we need to develop a Sabbath perspective that reorients us to begin each new week looking for ways to renew and restore our **own** lives and the lives of others. We need to be reminded again and again that the Sabbath is not just for our **personal** well-being but for the abundant life of **others**.

To remain tireless, relentless, and persistent in our pursuit of life for ourselves and for all persons necessitates Sabbath-keeping. So observe the Sabbath, dear friends, so that life, indeed, is holy for all. AMEN