

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

2nd Sunday after Pentecost
June 14 2009
Glendale Lutheran Church

O DAY OF REST AND GLADNESS

Mark 2:23-28

I.

“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” You know that as the Third Commandment, which we have just recited. To which we then responded through song,

O day of rest and gladness

O day of joy and light.

O balm of care and sadness,

Most beautiful, most bright.

This day the high and lowly,

Through ages joined to bless

Sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy,’

The triune God confess.

Regarding the “rest” part, that’s easy for some to say, yet for many that’s simply not an option – firefighters and police don’t say ‘call me tomorrow’ if there is an emergency; hospitals don’t close their doors on the Sabbath; neither, for that matter, does much else, for better or worse.

Beyond that, to keep the Sabbath holy is not just to ‘veg’ out for the day; it is to gather for worship, for, indeed, this is the LORD’S DAY. Worship is a privilege and highest priority; it is an opportunity but it is not an option or even a human obligation; worship is God’s initiative, God’s idea, yea, God’s

command. It's as simple as that! The decisions to worship or not to worship are usually based on what else is on our agenda; do we ever say or even think, "This is the command of God?" In one sense, it would be presumptuous for me to stand here and harass you about the imperative to be here at worship as the focus for your 'day of rest.' The ones who need to hear that are likely elsewhere, you would rightly counter. As for those of you who are here, I cannot adequately tell you how I feel every Sunday morning or Saturday evening when I see you gathering for worship together week after week, year in and year out, to see parents modeling for their children what it means to walk the walk and to talk the talk. Your faithfulness humbles me, overwhelms me at times. I really mean that, and I say it today as a reminder never to take for granted your faithfulness in worship. Each and every week before leaving the sacristy I pray, "Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of leading your people in worship. Receive our worship as a response to the magnitude of your mercy and love for us." As I have shared with our seminary fieldworkers many times, to be a worship leader is a daunting responsibility and overwhelming obligation. Oh, how I pray that the Spirit will pervade this place and these people, and my heart as well. And I also pray that the words, hymns, prayers, readings, sacraments do, indeed, provide that "balm of care and sadness" to those who have been wearied by the trials of life and living throughout the week.

II.

The Gospel reading for today sheds even more light on the Sabbath, through the eyes of Jesus, who had to remind the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Loosely interpreted, although weekly worship is imperative, it is not dull routine or lifeless ritual or pious repetition. We don't worship so that God will be pleased with us, nor do we come here to give God trinkets or leftovers in our lives. Of course I pray that each of us leaves here lifted up, edified, ready to greet a new week in the Lord. But, human nature being what it is, including our own individual desires, needs, and tastes, that doesn't always happen. I acknowledge that, and wish it were otherwise. On the other hand, our primary purpose as we enter those doors for worship is: a) to give God glory and honor and praise and firstfruits. In the first place, worship is not about us; it is about Almighty God, who is the center of our attention and affection, the object and the subject of our worship. Secondly, I submit that our minds and hearts need to focus on how, having heard the Word of the Lord and being sustained through the Sacrament, we may use what we have heard in order that we may bear witness to the saving Gospel of Christ as we have opportunity, to grow in the relationship we have with our Lord.

When our new facilities were being planned, there was much discussion about the cornerstone and what to put on it. I am so glad and grateful that small ad hoc committee did what they did; that is, not put just a short, catchy phrase but literally the entire verse from Ephesians 4:15, which I read every time I climb those few steps to enter this place and which, obviously stands as a challenge for each one of us: ***In all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.*** And where does that growing find its nurture – worship, of course. Again: worship is to give God glory and then to be equipped for ministry. Our edification is a byproduct of that.

That's what the Pharisees had to learn in spades when they confronted Jesus about 'violating' the Sabbath law. God forbid, the disciples were hungry and

so they entered a field, picked the ripened grain, shucked the skins, blew them to the wind, and ate the kernels (not exactly what we would call a Sunday brunch.) Actually, that was permitted in the Jewish Torah, yet the Pharisees saw that as unauthorized ‘labor.’ These Pharisees didn’t have the foggiest idea of what the Sabbath – ergo, worship – was meant to be – by now, you know the response – give God glory and be equipped for ministry.

III.

Remember where we started – with the Third Commandment – that’s Law, a mandate to worship – but even that is predicated on Gospel. The Ten Commandments were given by God following the covenant he had established with them to be his chosen people. “Remember,” God said, “remember when you were slaves in Egypt and I delivered you from evil Pharaoh. Why? Because you were so humble and repentant? No, because I loved you then and I love you now.”

Echo all of that in the Gospel reading. The Pharisees were so entrapped with bare and bald legalism that the power and presence of the Sent One of God, His own and His only Son, was hidden from their eyes. So, for Jesus to say to them, “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath,” he was extending to them an invitation – “Look to me, for I am sovereign, I am Lord, I am Savior. I am the One who has been sent from the Father; by the time I leave this earth, I will have kept the Law of God perfectly on your behalf; I will have died for all of your sins; and I will be called by persons throughout the world, ‘Savior.’ I am the One who has released you from the bondage of your Law; I am the One who is worthy of your worship.”

For the final time, well, at least for the time being: worship is to give God glory and to be equipped for ministry. Before planning for worship, I had

never read stanza 3 of our hymn, and it is so appropriate for us on both counts:

*This day, God's people meeting,
His Holy Scripture hear;
His living presence greeting,
Through bread and wine made near.
We journey on, believing,
Renewed with heavenly might
From grace more grace receiving,
On this blest day of light.*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.