

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Why Do We Worship?

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.²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need?²⁶ 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."²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Here's a simple question: why are you here this morning? Maybe that question isn't so simple. It takes a little bit of soul searching for us to answer truly why we come to worship on a Sunday morning. Some may think: "I have to be here. Mom and Dad drove me here this morning." Some may say: "I'm here because this is where I go every Sunday morning. This is my habit." Some may say: "I'm here because I know I should be in church. It's what Christians are supposed to do: go to church on Sunday." But isn't there something more than those answers? Isn't there a greater reason for us to come together and worship week after week? In the third commandment, God says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." What does it truly mean to remember the Sabbath day? What does this have to do with our worship? Let's look at our Gospel reading for today to find the answers.

Our reading is recorded in the second chapter of Mark's gospel. This is something that occurred rather early in Jesus' public ministry. His disciples were just learning from him what it meant to be one of his followers and what he had come to this earth to accomplish. One day, as Jesus was walking with his disciples—no doubt, teaching them about the Scriptures—it happened to be a Sabbath day. This was the day of the week when God's people were commanded to rest and do no work. The disciples were apparently hungry, so they picked a few heads of grain as they were walking along. This was no seven course feast. It was simply a meager meal to satisfy their hunger. Yet the Pharisees were offended by their action. They said, "*Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?*"

We remember that the Pharisees were the sect of Jews who were very interested in living upright lives and keeping God's commands. They liked keeping the law so much that they made up their own laws and tried to keep those as well. In their words from our reading today, however, they show that they really had no idea what God's law was all about. They saw the law merely as a set of rules and regulation to be followed. They did not see the true intent behind God's law—the way in which God intended to bless his

people through the law, not burden them. They were interested in the outward shell of the law—but they missed its inner meaning. Jesus pointed this fact out to the Pharisees by giving them an example from the Scriptures. When David was on the run for his life from Saul, he and his men were hungry. They went to the high priest at the temple and asked for bread. The priest gave David and his companions some of the Bread of Presence, which was supposed to be eaten only by the priests. In this case, keeping David and his companions alive was more important than the outward regulations of the law. The Pharisees were condemning a similar act by the disciples. They just couldn't get their minds past the outward form of the law to see its true intent.

At times, we are tempted to have a similar view of our worship: The third commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." We reason that this means we have to go to church at least one day a week. As long as we show up for worship, we are keeping God's command. Of course, this is completely missing the point. We don't worship to simply fulfill some weekly obligation. We don't keep the third commandment by simply putting our seats in the seats at church. There is much more to it than that.

There is also this little Pharisee inside of us that wants to dictate the way in which we worship. We think that in order for it to be true worship we need to follow certain rules and regulation. We have to use a certain order of worship or sing hymns from a certain book in order for our worship to be acceptable. And we better be sure it all gets done in the right amount of time or we run the risk of breaking one of God's greatest commands: that no worship service should last longer than 60 minutes 70 minutes if there is a real good reason (I still haven't found the place in the Scriptures where that one is written). By saying these things, I'm saying the way in which we worship is unimportant, nor that there is no value in following a certain liturgy or singing certain hymns. But we need to realize that we do these things for a higher purpose. If we are just following the order of worship and singing the hymns because we think this is what we are supposed to be doing, we are missing the point. We need to remember what the third commandment is truly about.

Why is it that God gave the command to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy? Jesus told the Pharisees in our reading, "The Sabbath was made for the man, not the man for the Sabbath." With these words, Jesus let the Pharisees know that the Sabbath was made to benefit man. It was not made so that man would simply have some extra rules to follow. In what way was the Sabbath to be a benefit for man? God purposely set up this day of rest so that man would be forced to take a day off and focus on what was truly important: God's Word. Without a day of rest, man would be tempted to work himself to death and never step back to meditate on what his work was all about—serving his God.

In this way, the Sabbath day was truly a blessing. It was one day a week when God's people could gather together and not worry about anything but worshipping their God. They could hear the Scriptures read and the wonderful works of the Lord told to them. They could hear the many promises of God and know that he was going to keep those promises in his time and in his way. They could bring their cares and concerns to the Lord in prayer and know that he would hear them. When we look at the intent of the

Sabbath day, we see that Jesus' disciples were not breaking this command, they were keeping it. What better thing could they be doing on the Sabbath day than listening to the Savior speak? After all, the Sabbath was intended to point all people to the words of the Lord. Here, the disciples were hearing them from the Lord himself. There was nothing wrong with that.

It is important for us to realize that the Sabbath law is intended to be a blessing for us as well. Our reading from Colossians reminded us of the fact that we are no longer obligated to adhere to the ceremonial aspect of this law. We have no obligation to take one day of a week and refrain from all work on that day. We, do, however have the moral obligation to set aside time for God and his Word and to worship him. This is not a burden for us, but a blessing. In our worship, we have the opportunity to confess our sins to God. We can take that load of guilt that we have been carrying around all week and dump it at the foot of the cross. In our worship, we hear words of forgiveness from God. Your sins are forgiven. Your guilt is removed. These are words that we might not necessarily hear the other six days of the week. These are words that our soul needs to hear week after week. In our worship, we hear the Scriptures read and we respond with prayer and songs of thanksgiving. This isn't just standing up, sitting down and saying the words in bold print. This is our opportunity to gather as a family of believers and have a conversation with our Savior God. It's not something we will want to miss.

The way we worship is not commanded by God, but there is a reason we worship the way we do. Our order of worship gives us the chance to do all the things I just mentioned every week. It highlights God's Word to us and gives us an opportunity to respond in prayer and thanksgiving. Is it the only way that God's people can worship? Certainly not. We could remember the Sabbath day by following a different order or style of worship. And in the future, we may choose to make some changes to the way we worship. But at the heart of it all must be the command of God to remember the Sabbath—to take time for God and his Word and in this way be blessed by him. May God give us all a desire to gladly hear and learn his Word together and in this way may we enjoy the Sabbath rest he has intended for us. **Amen.**

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Pastor Steven Hahm
pastor@crossofglorylutheran.com