

Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Psalm 81:1-10; 2 Corinthians 4:5-12; Mark 2:23-3:6

2nd Sunday after Pentecost B; 06.02.24; G. Miles Smith+

Since both the Old Testament and Gospel readings refer to the *Sabbath* then that's what I am going to talk about this morning. So I want to talk about...*memories of Sabbath...what the biblical Sabbath is...and then what we may do about the Sabbath these days.*

I grew up in Charlotte NC in the 1960s when “blue laws” were still largely in effect, meaning that there were not many businesses open on Sunday, except some gas stations. After Sunday morning church, our family would have long lazy days at home and sometimes go on a “Sunday drive”. *So, Sunday was a both a day to worship and a day of actual rest.*

I wonder what your early Sunday experiences were like? |

Throughout the Bible, *the Sabbath is actually Saturday*, specifically sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Keeping in mind that the biblical week began on Sunday and ended on Saturday, *the Sabbath was a day of rest from working, out of respect for the idea that on the 7th day—Saturday—God himself rested from the work of creation. And also, the biblical Sabbath carried the sacred memory that God had freed the Hebrew slaves from being worked to death in Egypt and gave them rest from their labors.* So, the Saturday Sabbath commandment to rest also meant that Sabbath-keepers should be a people who *would not overwork others*, like their Egyptian enslavers did—the Sabbath was also a gift to *anyone and any beasts of burden* within their homeland.

And then, later, in the New Testament, another day rose to special prominence—Sunday. Sunday was the first day of the work week...but *it became the day that Christians would gather for Holy Communion, because it was on Sunday that Christ was resurrected and first appeared to his disciples.*

So Sunday carried a lot of weight for the early Christians. *They did not call Sunday the Sabbath, but the “Lord’s Day”.* Only later in Christian history, did the Sunday *Lord’s Day* begin to be associated with the Saturday *Sabbath*. Especially in the 19th century in America a movement began among churches that claimed *Sunday as the Christian Sabbath*...and then increasingly as *the Sabbath*. So, ever since, we have both the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day flowing together into our Christian practice of Sundays:

1. *Sunday as Sabbath*--a day for rest and restoration...along with a prophetic resistance to overworking anyone...all out of respect for God; and
2. *Sunday as the Lord’s Day*--a day for returning to the good news of Christ’s resurrection through our sharing of Holy Communion as a new community of people being formed by Christ’s peace and forgiveness.

The practice of Sunday as *the Lord’s Day* means that most churches still gather to *worship* on Sunday mornings, as did the early apostles. It is of course becoming less so, as more people who identify as Christian do not attend in-person or online church on Sunday mornings. And the obstacles to doing so seem to continue to multiply. And for an increasingly large number of Americans who do not identify with any religion, the challenge of changing weekend habits and exploring a Sunday morning experience at church may be quite a far reach. But the Church has always believed that the Holy Spirit will keep drawing people into communion with people who gather in Christ’s name.

I wonder what keeps you coming back to worship at Grace? |

Which brings me to the Christian practice of Sunday as *Sabbath rest and restoration*. One of my earlier iterations of this homily went into detail about how busy we all are anymore...but I decided you didn’t need for me to tell you all that--we know it all too well! We can be kind of *proud* of being so busy...but also left feeling *helpless* about it. So, I think we all find ourselves so perplexed about our busyness...that it has almost

silenced the ability of the Church...to talk about Sabbath rest. Or even when we do talk about it, it is not unusual now for us to think of Sabbath rest as not necessarily occurring on either Saturday or Sunday...but anytime...and anywhere...we can find it.

I wonder what your challenges...and experiences...of Sabbath rest are like? |

Now, there is one other side to the practice of Sabbath rest and restoration that somehow keeps gets overlooked...and yet it is plainly said in the biblical command of the Sabbath. As it turns out, Sabbath rest isn't just about *Jews...or Christians...in our adoption of Sabbath rest as a religious responsibility for ourselves...*but it is supposed to be about all Sabbath-keepers' responsibility to...*guard the opportunity for rest and restoration...for others...especially those most vulnerable.* Rest and restoration--for *everybody*--is much more than a private personal matter...because it should be a priority for business, public policy, and politics...but of course that gets complicated very fast. But it is still possible for us as *individuals* to observe Sabbath in this way by intentionally *attending to and gifting* opportunities for rest and restoration for the people we know best...helping support them in getting the breaks they need...and having the time to creatively restore themselves...by doing the things they love best. We can give that Sabbath gift to others.

I wonder then if you may already be observing the Sabbath by attending to someone else's opportunities for rest and restoration in different ways at different times? |