

UNIVERSITY UMC OF REDLANDS, CA
“LORD EVEN OF THE SABBATH”

Mark 2:23-3:6¹

Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 2nd, 2024

Mark 2:23-28

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, ²⁶ how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?” ²⁷ Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Mark 3:1-6

¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” ⁴ Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

¹ New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Introduction.

We are in a month of tension for the churches, pastors, and our conference, pastoral appointments are being discussed and this represents a lot of work for the district superintendents, SPRC chairs, etc.

I ask for your prayers for me, for this church, and other churches in expectation of changes.

Like every month, we celebrate Holy Communion on the first Sunday, and it has always been my privilege to serve this sacrament both to those who participate in in-person worship and, during the week, to those who for some righteous reason are unable to do so.

Our text today is about bread and worship on the Lord's Day and God's purpose for our community.

At the beginning of the Gospel account, Mark brings together a series of stories that serve two functions:

- First, they establish the authority of Jesus – the authority to forgive sins (2:1-12) – to call a tax collector and sit at the table with sinners and publicans (2:13-17) – to allow his disciples not to fast (2:18-22) – to allow his disciples to cut ears of grain and eat on the Sabbath (2:23-28) – and the authority to heal on the Sabbath (3:1-6).
- Second, they present the antagonism of the scribes, Pharisees, and Herodians – an antagonism that will culminate in Jesus' death.

Well, our text for this morning presents us with both, the authority of Jesus and the antagonism of the Jews toward our Lord.

What does the Christian Sabbath mean to you?

What does Sunday, the "Lord's Day," mean to you?

The observance of the seventh day of the week commanded to Israel, was a "sign" between God and His earthly people, based on the fact that after six days of creative operations, the Lord rested, Ex. 31:16, 17; 20:8–11.

The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

²³ *One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.*

In that part of the world, wheat is usually harvested towards the end of spring or early summer. Dt. 23:25 allows the use of hands to harvest wheat from a neighbor's field but forbids the use of the sickle – the idea is to allow a hungry person to eat the neighbor's wheat but not to allow him to harvest it to sell.

According to rabbinic ideas, the disciples, by gathering ears of wheat (Mt. 12:1; Mk. 2:23) and rubbing them with their hands (Luke 6:1), broke the Sabbath in two places: for to pluck was to reap, and to rub was to thresh.

The Pharisees reasoned this way: Is it not forbidden to work on the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:8–11; 34:21; Deut. 5:12–15)? And here were these disciples engaged in this forbidden activity, and on the Sabbath, and Jesus did nothing about it!

“Have you never read about David and the bread of the Presence?”

Jesus is referring to an incident that appears in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 where David, warned by Jonathan, flees from King Saul. During the flight, David asks the priest Ahimelech for bread, but Ahimelech replies that the only bread available is the holy bread, the bread of the Presence, – bread that only priests were to eat in a holy place

However, Ahimelech offered the bread to David as long as David's servants would be kept of women. David promised that it would be so, and Ahimelech gave him the bread.

In Hebrew it is ‘lehem happanîm’ (Ex. 25:30). It consisted of twelve loaves of bread placed on that table in two rows. The twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel and symbolized the people's constant communion with their God.

It is as if God invited the Israelites to his table and consecrated them to him. By this offering of the showbread, they gratefully acknowledged their debt to him.

Every Sabbath (the Sabbath day in the Old Covenant) the loaves were exchanged for fresh loaves (1 Sam. 21:6). The loaves that were withdrawn were eaten by the priests.

Although Jesus does not say that the circumstances of his disciples are as desperate as those of David's disciples, the most obvious parallel is that both Jesus' disciples and David's disciples engaged in a forbidden activity (eating holy bread and cutting ears of grain on the Sabbath) to appease hunger.

²⁷ Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life, or to kill?

Jesus, after confronting the Pharisees with the authority of the Word, now shows that He has authority over man's superstitious dogmas. For He is the Lord of the Sabbath now called the Lord's Day.

¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him.

Mark does not indicate whether the man with the withered hand has asked to be healed. Supposedly, Jesus' actions surprise him – they amaze him.

Surely, this man doesn't want to become a public spectacle, but he may have seen the previous exorcism and responded with hope rather than shame.

³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.”

Now Jesus does not address his question to the man but to the crowd – to his opponents. “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?”

It presents two possibilities – "do good on the Sabbath, or do evil" and "save a life, or take it."

His opponents, of course, would present a third alternative: Let's wait until the end of Saturday. Let's honor God on the Sabbath and heal this man the next day. It's not urgent. This man has already lived with this condition for many years. A few more hours won't change a thing.

But Jesus has come to bring life and freedom. What better time than Saturday to do a good deed? What better place than the synagogue?

Jesus does not agree with any interpretation of the Torah that prevents the alleviation of suffering on the Sabbath. In a situation such as the one mentioned here, we cannot imagine Jesus endorsing an interpretation that requires leaving the ‘dead there until sunset’.

⁴ *"But they were silent"*. Quiet! Watching! Waiting!

Waiting for Jesus to expose Himself! They've seen Jesus deal with the opposition, and so they don't want to get into a public debate with him.

⁵ *"And looking round them with anger, grieving over the blindness of their hearts"*. Jesus was angry and hurting

- angry that holy men are preventing a sacred work
- angry that little men enjoy so much power over the life of their community
- hurt by the hardness of their hearts
- hurt by his lack of compassion for a man whose illness has determined most of his life
- hurt that those responsible for interpreting the Torah have completely failed to understand God's will.

Jesus "says to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored healed" (v. 5). Jesus doesn't require much of this man, but he does require him to stretch out his withered hand to the assembled crowd.

In answering, the man (who surely felt the tension in the air) has to make a decision – he has to put everything with Jesus – to refuse to allow these powerful men who rule his city to control his actions.

Reaching out is an action with many consequences. On the one hand, he is healed. On the other hand, he will not be able to expect any favor from these Pharisees with whom he will have to share his daily life. Still, doing what Jesus asked of him was a work of courage – and perhaps, of faith.

Conclusion

And how can we keep the Lord's Day holy?

Christ is the center and Lord of this day, that is why we are here. It's not how you want to celebrate this day, it's not how I want it to be, it's how Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, has revealed it to us.

Dedicating this day to the Lord, dedicating rest to Him, after a week that has given us sustenance through work. Do not miss the call to gather with our brothers and sisters, this is very important.

To do works of love with our brothers and sisters and those in need. Dedicate the day to things that please the Lord, glorify the Lord, and build up our souls.

Let us dedicate this day to the Lord, not as a burden, but out of thanksgiving and adoration. To keep the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) as the Lord shows us is to fulfill the law, as long as we do so with a disposition to love God and love our neighbor.

God gave you this day so that you will be blessed.

Live the Lord's Day for Christ! Amen.