

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you”
(Deuteronomy 5:12).

Have you ever found yourself sitting in a broken-down car and stranded? Well, I have. One Mother’s Day I was driving myself back to college, but as I turned onto the interstate, everything on my dashboard began to flicker and the radio began a whoosh-whoosh sound. For anyone who has been there, you know what was wrong. It was the alternator. I coasted to a stop on the shoulder of Interstate 69.

A week earlier, I began noticing issues. And I took the car to get maintenance. I paid for a new car battery. As it turned out, there wasn’t a problem with the battery. But not every car stranded on the road is there because of a worn-out alternator.

For many new drivers, owning a car can be a challenge. Let’s say you are a new driver and one day, your car broke down. You are stranded. Thankfully, you are still near your workplace, so you call some fellow coworkers for help. One of them comes to assist you. When your coworker arrives, he asks you, “What happened?” Then you say, “I was just driving and then the car just quit running.” “Could you be out of gas?” “No, I just filled it up.” “Did it make a noise?” “Oh, yeah! As I was driving down the hill, it went *brump, brump, brump, pow!*” “When was the last time you changed the oil?” Like cars, our Christian faith needs to be under constant maintenance.

Now, how often do you hear statements such the following? “I don’t need to attend a church to be a Christian,” which means, “I don’t want Jesus teaching me how to live.” Or: “I’m spiritual, but not religious,” which is a copout for saying: “I don’t want to go to church.” Or: “Church is so boring. I’ve heard it all. I don’t want to hear the same thing over and over again.” Each of these statements are merely saying the same thing. They are all excuses. If we made excuses for not maintaining our cars, or made excuses for not eating and drinking, what would happen? Your car would be out of commission. You would die.

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:12). This likely sounds familiar. This is the Third Commandment of God’s Law. Now, what is different is that today’s text is not from Exodus 20, but from Deuteronomy, which means “second law,” since this is the second time that the Law of God is recorded in the Bible. Isn’t one time enough? Well, how is it with us? We often need to be taught something multiple times for it to eventually sink in.

Today, we begin the “green season” of the Church Year. For the next several months, the paraments will be green, which symbolizes our growth. Here at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, we are a disciple making community, where we *“Know, Grow, and Go.”* But in order to “Go,” we must first “Know” and “Grow.” You see, as Christ says in the Parable of the Sower, if you have no root, your faith will wither away. Or, if you continually live with the thorns of this fallen world, your faith may be choked (Matthew 13:3-9). So, in order to *“Know, Grow, and Go,”* we need to know God’s Word, spiritually grow in faith, so that we can share God’s grace with others! This is only accomplished through the Holy Spirit working in you!

As we begin this “green season,” it is certainly good, right, and salutary that we begin with the Third Commandment: ***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,”*** because it is on the Sabbath when our faith is fertilized, watered, and pruned by Law and Gospel in the Divine Service.

So, with our focus this morning on the Sabbath, what exactly is meant by Sabbath? Well, Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word “shabbat,” which means rest. For some, “Sabbath” sounds a lot like “seven,” and the Hebrews did observe the Sabbath day on the seventh day of the week – Friday evening through Saturday evening. But “Sabbath” means “rest,” not “seventh.”

From Exodus 20, God spoke to Moses saying: ***“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”*** (Exodus 20:11). So, God “rested” from creating on the seventh day.

We all need rest. We all need a day to relax. For the Old Testament Jews, and most Jews today, they believe that the Sabbath day is only fulfilled by doing no manual work whatsoever. While God says we need to rest and relax, they were misinterpreting the Third Commandment. They were forgetting that they also need spiritual rest. They were more concerned with their manmade laws, such as how many steps a Jew could take on the Sabbath day. But God always desires man to rest in Him.

So, is there any importance on the particular day we celebrate the Sabbath? Are we wrong in worshipping God on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings? Are we in violation of the Third Commandment? Well, let's look at what God's Word says!

First from Romans 14. St. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes this: ***“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind”*** (Romans 14:5). So, what does this mean? It means that it is not necessary for Christians to observe the former Jewish Sabbath.

Next from Colossians 2. St. Paul writes, ***“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” ... “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ”*** (Colossians 2:13-14, 16-17).

Here, Paul is saying that the Old Testament religious regulations were intended by God to prepare His people for the arrival of the Savior. Those ceremonial laws, rituals, and practices served as ***“a shadow of the things to come”*** (Colossians 2:17). The substance is the important thing. Now that the Messiah has appeared, that old shadow can be disregarded.

Since the Messiah has come, we are not obligated to observe the Old Testament rituals, including how the Jews observed the Sabbath day. In fact, from the very beginning, the disciples of Jesus began worship on Sundays, rather than the Jewish Sabbath day. But why the change? It was done because the most important event in all of Christianity – *in all the world* – was revealed on Sunday morning – **the Resurrection of Jesus**. The world changed with the Resurrection of Jesus. Sunday is our justification day. For us, the Sabbath day changed, but the idea and the point of the Sabbath day has remained.

Sabbath – “shabbat” – means: “rest.” And Jesus is our Sabbath rest. For He says, ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath”*** (Mark 2:27-28). And elsewhere, He said, ***“Come to Me, all who labor and are heaven laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”*** (Matthew 11:28-29a).

Jesus is our Sabbath rest. So, how do we rest in Jesus?

First, we rest in Jesus, for in Him we receive forgiveness of sins. Jesus works forgiveness of all sins, because He gave His life on the cross to pay for what we have done wrong and for what we haven't done what we should have done. This we confess at each Divine Service.

This suffering and death of Jesus is enough to satisfy the justice and judgment of God the Father. Jesus did the hard work. And because of His suffering and death, we get to rest. We no longer work to try to appease God or to please God enough to overlook our sins. Jesus has accomplished salvation for us. His death and resurrection makes Him our Savior and Lord. You see, forgiveness is only by God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We are not in God's good graces and favor because of yours or my work. Jesus has made us God the Father's beloved sons and daughters by what He alone has done for us.

Second, we rest in Jesus, because He has fulfilled the ceremonial law for us. So, we no longer have to make burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, or have to eat a certain diet, or wear certain clothes. Jesus acted as our substitute, because He did what we are unable to do ourselves. Jesus kept God's Law perfectly, so that we can rest in Him.

Because of Christ, we can now rest any day of the week, but for good order, most Christians rest on Sundays, since it is the Lord's Day, the day of the Resurrection of our Lord. We rest in the hearing of God's Word, the reading of God's Word, the receiving of His Sacraments. So, whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, that is your Sabbath rest.

Jesus says, "***The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath***" (Mark 2:27). You see, the Sabbath was provided by God to satisfy important needs for all of us, a day of physical rest and spiritual restoration in Word and Sacraments. We keep the Sabbath by assembling ourselves together in mutual encouragement as we fellowship around Word and Sacraments as we "***see the Day drawing near***" (Hebrews 10:25). We keep the Sabbath as we hear those all too important words: "***Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.***" So, fill up your faith as we rest in Jesus, who alone is our Sabbath rest. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. + **SOLI DEO GLORIA** +