
THE SABBATH LIFE

As I was looking for some pictures related to today's gospel reading, I ran across this slide that another pastor, presumably from a different denomination, put together to help make a point about the Sabbath.

- [SLIDE] I want you to consider these "Sabbath Facts" and tell me which ones you think are true:
 1. GOD established it.
 2. The patriarchs kept it.
 3. Moses declared and obeyed it.
 4. JESUS commanded, declared, and obeyed it. HIS disciples kept it.
 5. Somebody else changed it.
- So which ones are true?
 - Did GOD establish it? (Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.)
 - Did JESUS command it and follow it? (Maybe/maybe not.)
 - Did HIS disciples keep it? (Today's reading suggests "no.")
 - If JESUS broke it, what does that mean for Sabbath keeping?

At the heart of what we're talking about is how do we remember the Sabbath and what is the Sabbath life?

Sunday, for Christians, is the LORD's Day, the day CHRIST rose, which we equate with Sabbath.

- A Sabbath from the weekly work of the home, the office, the school, and all the other tasks and chores from the week.
 - And indeed, it is much-needed rest, the kind of rest that lies behind the Gospel controversies and the Deuteronomy text for this week.

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your GOD has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your GOD. On it you shall not do any work.

By JESUS' day, the Pharisees, the religious lawyers of the day, had more than 100 rules just about keeping the Sabbath.

- For example, you can't pour your beverage on the ground because that might cause something to grow—and that would be agriculture—farming—work—labor.
- But despite the debates about how to keep the Sabbath, Sabbath is much-needed rest.
 - Yet, Sabbath rest is more than just a nap.
 - Sabbath rest is life-oriented and life-giving.
 - Or, at least, that's in part what GOD had in mind.
 - GOD rests at the end of creation so that creation can continue.
 - The Sabbath is created for life. And GOD rested for the sake of life.
- Not for a break.
- Not for some time out or time off.
- Not for a job well done.
- Not just to recoup.
- Not for the completion of a week's worth of reward.

Rest is needed, rest is essential because it anticipates action for the sake of life once again.

- When the Sabbath is for the sake of life, then it means getting back in there and figuring out where life needs to happen.
 - And doing that requires significant Sabbaths.

That's what JESUS was trying to show when the Pharisees confronted HIM about HIS disciples picking grain.

- Picking grain, rolling it in their hands to separate the grain from the husk, and then eating it.
 - GOD had required that farmers not harvest the outside edges of their fields so that travelers and the poor could harvest it for food.
 - The Pharisees said, "Not on the Sabbath" because that would be farming and threshing—work, labor.

Yet, JESUS suggests the Sabbath is for the sake of life and eating is life!

Called for in these debates about Sabbath-keeping is just what difference the Sabbath means in your life—not just your personal, individual, autonomous life,

- But how Sabbath-keeping creates a Sabbath perspective.
 - A Sabbath perspective sees that observing the Sabbath is not optional.
 - We keep the Sabbath to look around and ask, "Who needs rest?"
 - "Who requires life when no one else seems to notice?"
 - We keep the Sabbath to be reminded that without it, it becomes too easy to give up on fighting for those whose lives have been taken away.
 - We keep the Sabbath for the sake of resilience and ongoing resistance, to fight the righteous fight.
 - If we only see things in a certain way and then fight to retain that perspective, we lose the possibility of what GOD might be doing in our lives and world.
 - If we open ourselves to see things differently, however, and allow ourselves to be changed by that view, we more fully understand the GOD who created the Sabbath in the first place.

Pablo was a Filipino man who sometimes came to the worship services of a church I previously served.

- Pablo's piety led him to see the pastor as GOD's special representative, so when he arrived at church, he would come forward to greet me, including a kiss on the cheek.

One Sunday, Pablo arrived late, and the congregation watched to see if he would still come forward to greet me.

- The service had started and we were up to the Prayer following the Peace, and Pablo indeed was coming forward, so I waited until he came up the steps to the altar area.
 - Pablo kissed my cheek and then went and sat down.
 - But clearly, some folks didn't approve of both the interruption in the service and Pablo's affectionate greeting.

When the Sabbath becomes law, we then focus on distinguishing who are the Sabbath-keepers and who are not.

"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill it?"

- JESUS' question in the synagogue wasn't just about whether it was okay to heal on the Sabbath.
 - JESUS could have waited until the next day to heal the man.
- Nor was HE trying to provoke the Pharisees by doing this on the Sabbath.
 - JESUS was saying something more about the Sabbath and life—about Sabbath life.
 - HE was saying something about what matters for living the Sabbath life,
 - about justice and mercy and putting people ahead of traditions and rules and control.

The Sabbath is about life and the greatest Sabbath is the one where JESUS rose from the dead. (Talk about working on the Sabbath.)

It's hard work these days to be mindful about bringing life out of death.

- It's challenging these days to be heedful to those whose lives need restoration, healing, and wholeness.
- It's challenging to persist in acting with love and having life in mind when daily the face of hate and fear tries to gain the upper hand.
 - It's challenging these days to be vigilant in bringing about resurrection.
 - As mass shootings continue with no solution in sight?
 - As children are taken from their parents and lost?
 - As black lives and gay lives and women's lives continue to be determined and treated as worth less than?

It seems clear that a Sabbath life is barely in the peripheral vision of those in charge of supposedly sustaining life.

We need a re-commitment to a Sabbath life.

- Not just reasons to take a long weekend or plan a vacation.
 - Rather we need a Sabbath perspective that reorients us to enter into Monday and a new week looking for ways that we might renew and restore the lives of others.
 - Keeping the Sabbath, you see, is not just about your rest, but also the rest of those all around you.
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In the aftermath of the shooting in Sante Fe, Texas, David Frum in *The Atlantic* writes..."This carelessness and disregard is taking lives and breaking families. The first step toward correcting a social wrong is opening people's eyes to see that wrong. America has now tallied still more victims and broken the hearts of still more mourners. It's a horrible price to pay for a moral reckoning and awakening—but the history of the nation promises that while the awakening may come tragically slow, it does come in time, with all the power of justice delayed but not denied."

We need a Sabbath awakening.

- We need to hear again and again that the Sabbath is not just for our personal well-being, but for the abundant life of the other.
 - If we settle for Sabbath as just a reminder that simply encourages us to come here each week to commune with GOD and minimal activities on Sunday, it is at best an abbreviated view of Sabbath,
 - and at worst, a misinterpretation of GOD's commandment.

If you keep the Sabbath, you don't get to overlook those whose lives are being threatened daily. If you keep the Sabbath, you don't get to pass over how the lives of others are being stripped of their worth and dignity.

If you keep the Sabbath, you don't have qualifiers or quantifiers for who deserves abundant life and who doesn't.

The Sabbath life isn't about just keeping the Sabbath.

- It is about finding life in giving life to others.

We were not created so that someone would rest on the Sabbath.

- We were not made so that there someone would worship GOD.

The Sabbath was made so that we could regularly refocus on the thing that GOD most wants us to be about: finding life, renewing life, and giving life.

- Look for the places that need life.
- Look for the people that need life
- Look for the opportunities to give life, and then live—live the Sabbath life.