

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-8

Sermon Title: "Keep it Holy"

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What does Sabbath mean to you? When you think of Sabbath, which we in the Christian faith honor and celebrate on Sunday, what does it mean for you to keep this day holy? How is it different than any other day in your life?

I know I have shared some of this before, some in worship and some during Bible Study, but as I was growing up on the farm, we had certain ways of observing the Sabbath that set this day apart. While we still had the milk the cows, we did no field work, no laundry, no yard work – nothing that theoretically could wait until Monday. And as a young child, I remember church being a key part to our Sundays that also set the day apart. I remember getting ready for church, driving 45 minutes each way to get to the Methodist Church where my great uncle was the minister and while I don't recall much about the services themselves, I remember the sweet woman who always gave me a piece of hard candy and wink. I remember kneeling in the pew next to my grandmother as I was coloring the children's bulletin. I remember a feeling of peace. And then, when service was over, we would occasionally stop by a little roadside restaurant where you could get hamburgers and fries and we would throw some fries into the parking lot and feed the birds that would gather, or we would stop at Wendy's on our way home where my grandmother would always get the baked potato and chili (I don't know why I remember that specifically but I have vivid memories of it!) Finally, as the afternoon was just beginning, we would get home and I remember Sunday afternoons being the absolute best! We would watch TV, maybe read, take a much coveted nap as a summer breeze billowed in through the living room curtains and just relax – just enjoy the time free from labor. There really was a different feeling in the air when Sunday rolled around.

You know, even as I reflect on these things, I am filled with the sense that they gave me back then – a feeling of serenity, of calm, of joy, of peace. It's true that we all need a

Sabbath – a day of rest. And while for some this day cannot be found on Sunday, for example doctors and nurses, emergency responders, even public transit operators, and more who must work and serve on Sunday, we all still need a Sabbath at some point each week – a day set aside to rest. Why you might ask? Is it simply because it is listed in the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites? For me, it is not because it is a command, but because of the life-giving reasoning that I see behind it. The idea of the Sabbath comes from the creation narrative in Genesis, that after creating the world, deeming every step of the way good and even very good, God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day – God rested in the goodness of creation, in the beauty of it all. Not because God couldn't keep going or because God needed to pause for a minute to catch breath, but that there is tremendous value in resting in the goodness of creation.

And so, when asked how does one keep the Sabbath, how should we mark Sunday or whatever day we are able to hold as a Sabbath for us, it is about resting in the goodness of creation. What is it in the world, in life, that shows you goodness? For me, church has always been a part of that – a place where people with varying backgrounds and opinions, with varying ideas about the world and even varying beliefs about God, could still gather together, sing together, read together, grow together, worship God, and love one another – church has always showed me the goodness of creation. The church shows me this, the gathered body of followers who, though we may disagree and though difficult times will arise, we still gather together and love one another. And there is tremendous goodness in that. And for some, seeing the goodness in the world is found in family gathers and lunch outing, for others it is in a call to a friend whom you have not seen in some time or time outside literally in the beauty of creation. For some, it is found in a guiltless nap mid-day or binge watching your favorite TV show. Notice, that I did not say, watch the news and maybe it is just me, but the news has a way of reminding us what is wrong with the world, highlighting the troubles and challenges – the only time I have lately been uplifted by the news is when Good Day Maine features their furry friends adoption segment – cats and dogs truly have a way of fill my heart

with so much goodness. And so, for the past several years, I try to keep my Sabbath free from news. For six days, I will watch for it is important to be informed about what is happening in our world, it helps us pray for and care for the needs of the world, but I think we need the break every seventh day for on that Sabbath day, we need to surround ourselves with the goodness of creation, the goodness of humanity.

Now, from this understanding of the Sabbath as a time in which we are to relish in the goodness of creation, Jesus then expands it to also include the holy work of creating goodness. In our gospel reading for today, as he and the disciples are walking through a grain field, hungry, he showed mercy and allowed them to pluck grain. For you see, plucking grain was seen as work and thus was a rule broken in Sabbath observance, but what Jesus does is expand our understanding of Sabbath, for rules of observance should never get in the way of showing mercy. Rules of observance should never get in the way of us creating a glimpse of goodness – of love, justice, righteousness, and peace. So, create goodness on the Sabbath too! Maybe you will bake a treat for a new neighbor who has moved in down the street and deliver it to them, welcoming them to town. Maybe you will volunteer for an organization that you believe in that nourishes our world with goodness and beauty. Maybe you will pay it forward at the grocery store, paying for the order of the person behind you, or in line at the coffee shop, buying a stranger a cup of coffee. Maybe you will lend a helping hand when you see a friend or stranger toiling in their garden or working on their home. Even something as simple as striking up a conversation with someone new has the chance to bring more beauty into our world. And through it all, we create goodness.

So, let us remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Keep it holy by cherishing the goodness in our world, wherever we can find it. Keep it holy by creating goodness in our world, however we can. Keep it holy, for we all need a day of rest and a day of goodness in our lives. And may a Sabbath of goodness, empower us for a week of work ahead as we seek to build up the kingdom of God. So be it and may it be so. Amen.