

2026. 0830. Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath day Jesus took a walk through the grain fields, and the disciples began to pick ears of grain as they went along. “The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Look, why are they doing something on the Sabbath day that is forbidden?” And Jesus replied, “Did you never read what David did in his time of need when he and his followers were hungry- how David went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the loaves of offering, which only the priests are allowed to eat, and how he also gave some to those with him?” Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Our world is weary from constant busyness, productivity, anxiety, and information overload. Yet from the creation story in Genesis, we know and believe that God designed us for rhythms of work and rest. Sabbath, then, is a gift woven into creation itself.

Before today’s passage, Jesus revealed his identity as God’s beloved son through his baptism. He was then led into the wilderness, where he faced temptation by Satan and was reaffirmed in who he was. Afterward, he began his ministry in Galilee by calling his first disciples.

One of the first things Jesus did was restore people who were suffering: a man with an unclean spirit, people with skin diseases, a paralytic, and many others throughout his ministry. He also shared meals with those whom society called sinners.

During his healing ministry, Jesus continually revealed to the people, including his disciples, who he was, what he was doing, and what truly mattered in his ministry, whether they understood it or not. And his ministry continued no matter what.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus often disturbed the religious leaders. While they focused on preserving traditions and boundaries, Jesus focused on restoring hurting people—healing the sick, eating with sinners, and meeting human need wherever he found it.

In today's passage, that tension reaches a boiling point over a simple field of grain.

We gather today for worship on Sunday, a day many call the Sabbath.

Traditionally, we have understood the Sabbath as a time when we gather publicly for worship—on Saturday or Sunday, depending on one's custom. For many, this pattern and practice remain meaningful. Yet it has also led us to think of Sabbath simply as a day of rest—like a day off from work—separated from the rest of our lives, as if we come into this holy place apart from the world.

Why do we gather for worship on Sunday when today's passage reminds us that the Sabbath is for people?

What does the Sabbath truly mean?

When we think of Sunday worship, some people understand it as a way to set ourselves apart from work to be holy. Others have understood the Sabbath through practices such as increased prayer, studying Scripture, and reading spiritual books. These practices can deepen our experience of Sabbath and nurture our relationship with God. Yet this was also the main point of the religious criticism of Jesus' actions: the belief that the Sabbath was meant primarily for our relationship with God, not for our relationships with others.

However, when we think of worship, we think of a way we celebrate and recognize God's presence in us and others. Worship is not confined to a single day or place; it must continue in the way we live our daily lives.

This means that our work for peace, justice, and mercy in the world should continue no matter what day of the week it is.

This is how we understand worship, and it leads us to think more deeply about the true meaning of Sabbath.

Sabbath is more than simply “not working.” It is an intentional practice of stepping away from what we normally do so we may rest, be renewed, and be made new.

We need to empty ourselves of what tires us and fill ourselves with what restores us.

Sabbath is not simply an occasional “day off.” It is for the good of our souls, for deepening our relationship with the divine, and for shaping how we live with others. Sabbath points beyond a single day toward life with God; it is both a present experience and a future hope.

Jesus’ teaching this morning reclaims the Sabbath’s true purpose: “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.”

In Deuteronomy 5:12–15, the Sabbath is presented as freedom from endless labour.

Those who have experienced oppression are invited into rest. In this way, the Sabbath becomes a practice of liberation for all—including servants, immigrants, and even animals. Through the Sabbath, God restores dignity and justice,

reminding us that our worth comes not from our productivity, but from being God’s beloved. This promise is given through God’s covenant with God’s people.

We are called to carry the gift of Sabbath into the tender discipline of the rest of our week, so that the reign of God may break into the world as we know it. It is not Sabbath or work; it is Sabbath and work. God’s presence is in both.

Recognizing God’s presence in ourselves and in others is central to this kind of attention. As we learn to notice God’s presence, we grow in our ability to live more faithfully, coming alongside others in both their joy and their pain.

The Sabbath is God’s gift for that reason, not merely a command.

As we learned from the Gospel, Jesus often told his disciples that they must accept the challenges that come with following him; the message shifted. They will go together, and Jesus will show them what it looks like to really suffer alongside others – to take up their crosses and follow him. It is a core message in today's Sabbath story.

When we look back on our summer, I hope we can do so with grace. We may have had plans for the people we hoped to become or the things we hoped to accomplish, yet many of us feel like the exact same people—tired, overwhelmed, or grieving.

Still, our summer holds many stories—moments that bear witness to something enduring, something that has carried us through more than we could have managed on our own. When we slowed down, God was continually showing up alongside us, even when we failed to notice.

As we close this season and step into a new beginning, let us encourage one another to move beyond the patterns that keep us trapped in constant busyness and anxiety. Instead, let us receive the Sabbath as the gift it was meant to be—creating space to encounter God's presence through rest, renewal, and caring for one another.

Thanks be to God.

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