



SERMONS

by

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Bible readings: Luke 13:10-17 and Isaiah 58:9-14

Key Message: 1) Exploring how to shine our light in darkness 2) Exploring how Jesus loves outcast

Title: "The Sabbath was made for people"

What does the Sabbath mean to us? The word Sabbath simply means "rest" and is rooted in what God did after creating the world in six days. "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:1-3) But what does it mean to observe the Sabbath and rest?

Let's turn our attention to the book of Isaiah 58:9-14 for a moment, which we heard, read earlier. This was after the people's return to Israel from the Babylonian Exile and the restoration of the Temple. Isaiah tells us that it was a hard time for the nation of Israel – people were oppressed, hungry, homeless and naked. Injustice could be seen in many areas of their lives. In this difficult time, they prayed and fasted in an attempt to know God's way and receive His approval that they were righteous people.

But what was the result? The people heard nothing from God. God remained silent. They asked God, "Why have we fasted, they say, and you take no notice?" God answered them through the prophet Isaiah, "You don't understand, do you? You fast and pray, but it is not the way I choose. You are doing it for yourselves! Go out and offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness." God also told them to remove the yoke from among them, stop the pointing of the finger, and the speaking of evil.

This is consistent with the Gospel reading that we had read earlier, where religious observance and concern for the poor can and should stand side by side. Jesus does not eradicate Sabbath observance – a key part of his own Jewish identity – rather, He reclaims its original intention from the way the Pharisees have shifted it.

I believe this teaches us three key things:

1. Firstly, the Lord is present in our hour of need, but we must be the light 'in' the world, for 'others', not for ourselves, as it will make possible God's saving activity.
2. Secondly, we must refrain from all forms of Church politics, obsession with status, and focus on social injustice to avoid separation in our relationship with the Lord. Rick Warren says, "Self-worth and net worth are not the same. Your value is not determined by your valuables. Real security can only be found in that which can never be taken from you - your relationship with God." Paul in Philippians 3:7-8 counted the best the world could offer, including his assets, as rubbish/liabilities compared to knowing Jesus Christ.

3. Lastly, in all our churches across the world, we need to stop falsely accusing people with fear tactics and stirring up trouble. The Apostle Paul had every reason not to forget his past either. He had hunted down Christians, ordered their arrest, and prosecuted them. But God's plan was not limited by his past (Philippians 3:6). This is a lesson for us – so from now on it is about recognizing that this is where we used to be and deciding to surrender ourselves to God, allowing His transformation to take place in us.

I know this is not easy, Church, but we can be encouraged by the Lord's promise for the faithful remnant. God offers us motivation by promising us that the faithful remnant will be the foundation for many generations; and would be called "the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

Can we do that for God? Can we be generous to our community?

So how can we apply the Sabbath more meaningfully in our Christian life?

Church, we all have our own unique mix of talents, skills, and passion. I believe Jesus is urging us to use them practically by attending to our community's needs through projects or situations where pain or hardship occurs.

Let me draw your attention to some interesting statistics.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement that many of us take for granted. So where are the world's displaced being hosted: 39% in the Middle East, 12% in America, and only 6% in Europe (2.5m from Turkey).

This makes me wonder, as a Christian nation with significant resources, are we really doing enough to attend to people's needs? Let me be clear, it is the right of all countries to control their borders, but how do you avoid being seen as self-serving? From our church's point of view, are we making enough provisions or doing enough to attend to people's needs?

People from outside our church won't care about our religion unless we can show them how we care for those in need. Without really understanding the meaning of the Sabbath and proper application, we can so easily become dogmatic, resistant to change, uncompassionate, and become driven by self-preserving and destructive influences, just like the Pharisees.

Let's draw our attention to the Gospel Reading.

Luke tells us, "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years.

She is a daughter of Abraham - stresses the woman's membership in the covenant community. She was bent over and was unable to stand up straight." (Luke 13:9-10). This incident took place during Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. We know she was an outcast who had probably lived by begging for most of her life – unable to work or do the basic things that most of us take for granted. The word 'outcast' means to be rejected and cast out by society or social group. She had been to the synagogue every Sabbath for 18 years. Some of us are maybe afflicted in some similar manner this morning.

It appears she had suffered for over 18 years without receiving compassion. She had not been healed even though she prayed and still she remained faithful and believed in God! She comes to the temple, in spite of the fact that no one would think a thing about her if she did not.

When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." The religious leader saw that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath and shouted to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day." The leader was implying that the Sabbath was more important than the needs of the people.

He was dogmatic and not open to the change that Jesus' teaching had brought. He lacked compassion and pretended to uphold high sets of beliefs when, in fact, the Pharisees were actually doing the opposite by attending to the needs of their animals on the Sabbath.

Jesus rebuked this idea and simply told this man that he was placing the needs of animals above the needs of people! In fact, Jesus tells him that he is a hypocrite! He loves his religion more than he loved God, or God's people! The ruler of the synagogue was determined to carry out his religion without being distracted by the needs around him. Jesus, on the other hand, was always looking for how He could help those around Him.

Jesus' response teaches us that the normal Sabbath law of His day may need to yield to human need and Jesus identifies himself with the outcasts.

How does this relate to us today brothers and sisters?

In many ways, we can see this happening today. Far too often we can let our own emotions and laws/regulations get in the way and make our Church unwelcome to outsiders or people that use our Church without perhaps intentionally setting out to do so. Therefore, the Sabbath and our Church becomes exclusive and meaningless - just a day to get together to worship for a few hours and then go off separately to our own homes.

But what about our call to be like Jesus? Surely, it demands more than that, no? Church, there is more to the Sabbath than just coming to Church on a Sunday for a few hours to sing hymns, listen to a sermon, and then socialize with our circle of friends and Christian brothers and sisters. What about the outcasts of our community? Are we welcoming them or excluding them? Are our actions bringing division or inclusion?

At the September Synod meeting of the London District of the Methodist Church that took place on Saturday the 10th, ministerial and lay members were challenged to organize local collections of food on the 18th and 25th of September for the refugees at Calais, where stocks are very low and there is desperate need.

Throughout Luke, we get a sense of who Jesus is and what discipleship means. We can see the immediate power of Jesus healing when the woman praises God in verse 13 of the gospel reading. This demonstrates that Jesus is compassionate, practical, a friend to outcasts – sent to seek the lost.

Brothers and sisters, I think as a Church we need to ask how we can use the Sabbath to meet the needs of our community.

I believe this calls us to show discipleship and that's not always an easy task. It means we have to seek the lost and outcast in our community as Jesus clearly did. Overturn social conventions/power. Give away pride and status. Can we be a friend to the outcasts of our community?

I want you to notice that in the gospel reading Jesus made the first move. He called her to come to Him, verse 12. She responded to His call, came to Him, and got the help she needed. What is your calling or gifting? What has God placed in your heart this morning? Is He calling you today? Like Jesus, God wants us to make the first move to those in need.

Or like the woman in the synagogue, perhaps there is something in your life that has you bound? Some past hurt, rejection, or illness? Maybe you've been praying about it and haven't got the answer or result you've been seeking for? It is important you don't allow failure or disappointment to become your identity. God wants you to know today that He hasn't forgotten you and He loves you.

At the start of my sermon, I asked, what does the Sabbath mean to us? I'll conclude with a quote from Dr. James Houston about what he thinks the Sabbath should mean to us today:

"No longer [is the Sabbath] a legalistic remnant of Judaism, but it is given its full meaning in the finished work of Christ. It continues to challenge human arrogance, independence of spirit and the technical-mindedness that confuses means with ends, so that efficiency today becomes a goal in itself. . . Rest on the Sabbath signifies the goodness of God's creation, as well as our salvation in the incarnate Christ."

May God help us and bless us in our everyday life and every moment we live to raise up the foundation of many churches and to be the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in. **Amen.**

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