

Luke 14:1–11  
17th Sun. after Trinity  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
October 1, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The Sabbath day was a constant source of controversy in our Lord's earthly ministry. Jesus and His disciples were regularly accused of violating the usual Sabbath observance of not working. The Pharisees in particular were constantly seeking to trap Jesus by getting Him to do some kind of work on the Sabbath so they could build a case against Him. Jesus was a threat to the religious establishment, so the religious establishment sought any possible way to remove Jesus from the scene. If the Pharisees could get Jesus to say or do something that seemed to violate the Law of God, then He could be tried and punished, or at the very least His reputation as a holy man would be diminished.

That's what we see happening in the Gospel text appointed for today, the 17th Sunday after Trinity. One Sabbath, Jesus was eating at the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. And the Pharisees were watching Him carefully to see what He would say or do. They were waiting for some statement or some action that would violate the Sabbath, something they could use against Jesus.

To understand what's going on here and what Jesus is doing, we need to understand what the Sabbath actually is. Technically, the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week and it was held sacred by the people of God in the Old Testament. After six days of creating everything, God took the seventh day off, a day of rest. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His

work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation.” Of course, God did not need to rest from work. It’s not as though He grew tired or weary from his work as we do. He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleep. But God set apart the seventh day for rest as an example to us, His creatures. If God set apart one day of the week as holy, how much more ought we to set apart one day of the week as holy.

In the 10 Commandments, the Law about Sabbath rest was literally set in stone. God etched the commandments in the stone tablets for Moses to proclaim before the people. Honor God above all. Honor His name above all names. And honor His day above all days. That’s the Third Commandment. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” In Exodus 20, God continues: “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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 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” (Ex 20:8–11).

The Third commandment about setting apart the seventh day was not just good advice or helpful recommendation. It was a Law of God that brought with it great blessings for obedience, and great curses for disobedience. Later in Exodus, the LORD said to Moses: “Everyone who profanes [the Sabbath] shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people . . . Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death” (Ex 31:14). A violation of the Sabbath was a capital offense, a punishment that was actually

enforced. In Numbers 15, a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. The people brought the Sabbathbreaker to Moses and Aaron and the LORD said to Moses: “The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” And that’s exactly what they did.

From the Old Testament accounts you can see how seriously honoring the Sabbath day was taken and you can begin to understand the background of the pharisaical insistence on no work on the seventh day. It was a matter of life and death! And then comes along Jesus who seems to walk right up to that red line when it comes to working on the Sabbath day. Does Jesus cross that line? That’s what the Pharisees are constantly trying to figure out. If Jesus does cross the line and violate the Sabbath, He could be stoned to death. And that’s what many of them were hoping for.

Just like you might have a nice Sunday dinner, which at least in generations before us was the standard, Jesus spent one Sabbath dining at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees. A man with dropsy was there too, dropsy being a disease where the body retains water. Today this retention of water is linked to all sorts of bodily malfunctions, like congestive heart failure. The retention of water in the body is a noticeable ailment. Everyone at this Sabbath dinner party knew something wasn’t right with that guy. Jesus notices as well. The Pharisees were watching Jesus closely all dinner, waiting for Him to stumble. Instead, Jesus poses the question to them: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” The Pharisees remain silent. They don’t know how to answer this one. Is healing technically considered work? If Jesus heals someone on the Sabbath, would He be violating the Sabbath? So Jesus boldly heals the man with dropsy. He doesn’t discuss the matter. He doesn’t give the Pharisees anymore time to think through the

question. He simply does what He knows He needs to do. Jesus healed the man with dropsy and sent him away.

Jesus then said to the Pharisees: “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” They couldn’t respond to that either but sat there stupefied. Jesus was pointing out their hypocrisy. If it’s lawful to help a needy person or a needy animal on the Sabbath, then of course it’s lawful to heal on the Sabbath. The problem is that the Pharisees took the command to not work on the Sabbath and they turned that commandment not to work into a work. That’s the perversity of our sin. We take what God means for our good and twist it into something completely different. At the end of Mark 2, Jesus says it like this: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” The Sabbath is not a burden. It’s all about resting from work, remembering what God has done for us, and finding refreshment in the LORD (Deut 5:15; Ex 31:17). Like all of God’s commands, the Sabbath isn’t about holding you back; it’s about helping you be who God created you to be.

So whatever happened to the Sabbath? Why do we set apart as holy Sunday instead of Saturday? What can or can’t we do on this day? First of all, remember what Jesus says: “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” The Old Testament Sabbath, like nearly everything in the Old Testament, pointed ahead to the coming of Christ and finds its fulfillment in Jesus. With the coming of Christ, the Temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the Sabbath all find their end. They were shadows of the coming Messiah, pictures for the people of God portraying what was to come in the new age. Jesus is our Sabbath rest. In Him we find rest from the accusations of the Law, rest for our conscience. In Jesus’s death and resurrection, we have peace with God and where there is peace there is no longer the incessant impulse to do something. We realize that

we're not the ones working, it is God working in and through us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). It is only in recognizing what God does for us in Jesus Christ that we can have true rest from our labors in both body and soul.

After Jesus Himself rested in the grave on the Sabbath, on Holy Saturday, He rose again on the first day of the week, on a Sunday. That's why we now set aside Sunday to rest and remember the things of God instead of Saturday. Our eternal rest began on the Sunday Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is the end and fulfillment of all Old Testament Sabbath regulations. In Him we have our Sabbath rest. So the command to worship the LORD specifically on Saturday no longer applies. There's still wisdom in setting aside one day a week to rest and focus on God and His Word. To honor the Lord's Day means we should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it. To sanctify the Lord's Day, then, is not to cease from all labor, although that is helpful. To sanctify the Lord's Day is to focus on everything the Lord has done and continues to do for us. This Sabbath rest is not one day of the week only. For a Christian, our Sabbath means resting and being at peace in the Word of God everyday, both in this life and in the life to come. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.