

June 18, 2006
Pentecost 2

"Why Did You Come to Worship Today?"

MARK 2:23-28

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Why did you come to worship today? It is another beautiful summer day, a glorious weekend on the Central Coast. Why are you not packing up the car to go to the beach, or finishing up an early round of golf, or meeting your friends at the lake, or sleeping in, or washing the car, or catching up on the gardening? Instead you are here in worship. You have come here to find the beautiful Sabbath peace and rest that can only be found in Jesus, a peace and a rest this world and all its blessings are not able to give you. It was Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

I am sure there are some people in your community who think you go to worship on Sunday for a different reason. They see you as a religious person who wants to earn favor with God. They see you doing your thing on Sunday to get a better place in heaven, or cash in on more blessings in this life. A woman who grew up in Spain was blessed with a beautiful voice. She told me that she believed she would get a high place in heaven for all the singing she did in churches without getting paid. Her mother even told her she would someday go to heaven without her shoes on. Then she came to know the real reason for coming to worship, not to earn God's favor, but to enjoy God's favor through the perfect peace and rest that is ours in Christ. This morning we want to hear Jesus tell us why we came to worship.

You did not come here to earn God's favor

At the time of Jesus there were people called Pharisees who believed that keeping man made Sabbath laws put them on higher ground with the Lord. Notice from our text how nit picky they were with Jesus and his disciples. "On the Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus and his disciples were not stealing as they walked through the fields and picked some heads of grain. According to Old Testament law farmers were to plant their fields so people passing by could stop and pick up some food to feed themselves when they were hungry. We cannot take these Old Testament laws and apply them to our situation today. We cannot stop along the road and pick strawberries or broccoli or lettuce, or pick ripe fruit from a tree.

What bothered the religious fanatics or Pharisees was the way Jesus and his disciple used their hands to pick the grain, then rub off the hulls and pop them into their mouth to eat. Have you ever done that? I have while growing up on the farm. When the grain was not quite ripe, we would pick it, rub the grain in the hands, blow off the hulls and pop it into our mouths while it was still somewhat chewy and not yet hard.

Picking grain, rubbing it and popping into the mouth? That was hardly work that broke the Sabbath laws. You heard what God did require when we read a few minutes ago: "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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your man servant and maid servant may rest as you do." The Sabbath was a time to rest your body and think about the blessings the Lord brought into your life. Just as God stopped creating on the seventh day and looked at the beauty of what he made, we are to stop making things or working, and take time to thank God for all his blessings.

It is amazing how human beings can take a blessing such as this Sabbath law and add man made rules and regulations that become more important than God's original plan. Jesus often condemned these Pharisees for making human traditions more important than God's plan to save the world from sin. Jesus said in Mark 7:9, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions." Generations of rabbis kept adding more and more restrictions on keeping the Sabbath. They even had a rule for how far you could walk from your home on the Sabbath day. They called this a Sabbath day journey, a distance of 2000 cubits or 3000 feet. This number came from a reference in Joshua on how far the people camped from the ark of the covenant while traveling in the desert. Later rabbis added the rule that you could extend that distance if you established residency along the way by eating or taking something from your household. Did you know later generations even said it was wrong to look in the mirror on the Sabbath lest you find a gray hair and be tempted to pick it?

Notice now how Jesus helps these people see the truth. He takes them back to the example of King David. When David was running for his life to get away from Saul who wanted to kill him, David and his men were hungry. They came to the priest for help. He gave them some bread that was on daily display in the tabernacle to show how God cares for his people. According to law only the priests could eat this bread. This example showed that during times of emergency, it was OK to use this bread to feed someone in need. The Sabbath laws of God were not intended as a way to earn salvation. Their purpose was to point to God's blessings of peace and rest.

Why are you here in church this morning? Why do we do what we do when we gather as we are gathering here today? Some of you dress up for worship. Others dress casually. Some Sundays we sing every word of the liturgy exactly as it is. Other Sundays we insert a different song of praise. In some churches the pastor wears a robe and vestments. In other churches the pastor wears a suit or even casual clothes. We love our traditions that point us to Christ, but we cannot turn these into rules and regulations that lead us to think we are earning God's favor by how we dress, how we kneel, how we sing or what instruments we use.

There has to be a reason why the Holy Spirit has recorded for us so many of the encounters that Jesus had with these religious people called Pharisees. Why does the Bible show us how strange they were in their religious practices as they majored in minors and focused on man made rules and regulations? Does the Lord not want us to look at our own hearts this morning?

In the Mark 7 where Jesus was talking to these religious people and condemning them for their strange traditions, he goes on to say something that applies to all of us. He tells us that external religious practices and attempts at self-improvement never solve the problem of the human heart that is corrupt before God. "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from the inside and make a man unclean." Keeping Sabbath laws or any other laws cannot make us pure and clean before God. I cannot hope to earn favor with God by coming to worship this morning. Our reason for being here today is to find in Jesus the cleansing of our sin, and the peace with our God. That is why we come to worship?

You came to enjoy God's favor

Now lets listen to what Jesus tells us about the reason for coming to worship today. "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" Why did God set aside the seventh day for his people? Did he set up these laws so they could earn his favor? No the very opposite is true. He set up these laws so they could take the time to enjoy God's favor and love and grace and mercy. In our reading from Deuteronomy the Lord said, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

Why do we celebrate our birthdays? Is there anyone who is having a birthday this month? Today? (Arlene) On our birthdays, our parents tend to remember what it was like on the day that we were born. When I celebrated my birthday, my parents often spoke of how hot it was that day. The Sabbath for God's people was a time to think of the blessings the Lord brought into their lives. It was a time to rest and reflect on how the Lord delivered them from Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. It was prime time to think about the future and the peace and joy that would come when the Messiah came into this world. Isaiah predicted this about the Messiah, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and the place of his rest will be glorious." Today, dear Christian we are living in the celebration of a glorious peace and rest only found in Jesus. There is a reason why we have changed our worship from Saturday to Sunday. That's the day that Jesus rose from the dead. That is the day he appeared to his disciples and said, "Shalom lechem." Peace be to you. The Sabbath was made for man. Man was not made for the Sabbath. It was made to bring us the peace in Jesus this world cannot give and celebrate Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a good time to enjoy the beauty of creation as God did when he first created our world. On the seventh day, the Lord our God rested from his work of creating the world, not because he was tired, as I heard one evolutionist blasphemously read from

the Bible in a lecture at UCSB some years ago. When it says God rested, it means he stopped creating, stopped and looked at the masterpiece he made, just as I look in my backyard and see the growth of the plants that I planted, or admire the wax job on the car, or rejoice in the carpet I cleaned this past week when the weather was hot and dry.

The best part of the Sabbath and our worship together here on Sunday is that we can stop and look at the work that Jesus completed for our salvation. Just think of it. It has all been done and it has been done perfectly. When Jesus died on the cross he said, "It is finished." He cried out with a loud voice for all the world to hear, "It is finished." You are sitting in a restaurant. The waitress places the food before you and says, "Enjoy!" The Lord your God places before you the blessings of complete forgiveness in Christ and says enjoy. He gives you the blessing of your baptism. He gives his body and blood with bread and wine. We sit back, relax, and enjoy these blessings given to us in such abundance. We love the words of Hebrews 4:10 where it says, "for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." The work has all been done. There is nothing left to earn God's favor. It has been done for us. All that is left is to enjoy the peace and rest we have in Jesus this morning and every day. That is why we worship.