

God's Work Gives Us Rest

‡ From religious wrangling (vv.23f)

‡ From physical needs (vv.25f)

‡ For serving the Lord (vv.27f)

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, dear fellow servants and children of God:

It always surprises me at meetings like the Minnesota District Convention this week how this pastor and this congregation are constantly credited for things we have not done. After nearly twenty years we're finally developing guidelines for lay lead Bible studies. But one pastor said when he asked whether anyone had some ideas about lay lead Bible studies, he was told to check at New Life because surely they have them. It seems the grass looks greener on our side of the fence.

It would be false to deny that God *has richly blessed* this congregation, but it would be conceited to deny that *God* has blessed this congregation. Spiritually speaking, we find ourselves between two jagged rocks of false humility and vain conceit. We need more than ever to keep our eyes and ears tuned to Jesus. So let's take a walk today with our Lord and His disciples through a field of golden grain where we can learn how lovingly **God's Work Gives Us Rest** – first of all...

‡ From religious wrangling (vv.23f)

This second chapter of Mark's Gospel spells nothing but trouble for Jesus from the "church people" of His day. He tells a paralyzed man, "***Son, your sins are forgiven***" (2:5), and they think Jesus is blaspheming God who alone can forgive sins. They still don't have a clue when the God-Man Jesus reads their minds and hearts. They fail to believe in Jesus when He heals the man right in front of them. When Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to be His disciple, the teachers of the law and Pharisees accuse Jesus of eating with the wrong crowd. When they notice Jesus' disciples are not fasting the way they do, they criticize our Lord again. Now it's Saturday and His hungry disciples are supposedly breaking the law.

At first you might ask, "Well, aren't they? You can't walk into a grocery store and start eating dinner!" – although it sometimes seems people do with the candy and their kids. But God's law through Moses did stipulate: "***If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.***" (Deuteronomy 23:25 NIV) Likewise their vineyards. God mercifully provided for the poor while still allowing them the privilege of working. It was like saying, "Go ahead and eat whatever you want in the store, but don't carry out bags of free food." Over the centuries Jewish tradition tried to cramp God's mercy by saying, "Yes, but not on the Sabbath."

Religious wrangling results from confusion about who is actually doing the **Work** of God. By nature we Lutherans are no different than worldly religions thinking God is impressed by pilgrimages or not eating meat on certain days. Making dietary rules for God is like buying an expensive golf club for an Amazon jungle tribesman. The UPS boat pulls up to the dock, and the chief asks, "What's this for?"

So let's be honest in the bright light of God's Word. We who have labored here since before our first worship service in Snail Lake School on September 13, 1987, are always in danger of thinking our work brings us closer to God. In self-righteous pride we want to take credit for the good and blame the bad on someone else. We tend to forget that whatever good has been accomplished has been done by God through His Word and sacrament. And so we can easily become impatient with energetic new members looking for opportunities to serve. But let us not forget that "***it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.***" (Philippians 2:13 TPA) God is the Worker of good desires, great ministry plans and successful Gospel ministry. **God's Work** alone **Gives Us Rest** – **From religious wrangling** and...

† From physical needs (vv.25f)

Something else we need to admit. This gets a little personal. If someone broke into the church and ate everything in the kitchen we might cut them some slack. But if those hungry people ate up all the Communion wafers, would we condemn them as irreligious, irreverent pagans?

Yet that's not far from what David did while running away from King Saul. He did not break into the Tabernacle, the tent where the LORD's holy ark of the covenant was housed. But David did break the law of Moses by eating the showbread set out every Sabbath in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. The leftover bread was only legal for priests and their families, not for anointed kings. David broke the law. Yet Jesus points to his actions as something as keeping the spirit of the law. Moses' regulations against thievery were easier on the hungry than on thieves? We saw how victims of Hurricane Katrina were allowed to take food from grocery stores without paying for it, but not electronics from Best Buy.

So quick we are to condemn. So slow to help those in need around us. So self-righteous we are that we want to take credit for our full freezers and fine cars as if our hard work, our education, our ingenuity accomplished all this for us. But we need to repent of such sinful pride because it is still true today that *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”* (James 1:17 NIV) Only **God's Work Gives Us Rest...**

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Then Jesus told them, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”* We are to benefit from Sabbath-**Rest** to serve God not regulations.

Many self-righteous Americans, WELS Lutherans included, hear the word *“Sabbath”* and immediately think, “Well, we don't have to go to church!” They think that because the Lord in the New Testament set us free from the Sabbath laws which foreshadowed Christ, somehow God no longer cares whether we worship or not. They treat God's grace as a license to do whatever their old sinful nature desires and ignore the fact that Jesus' custom was to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Can you worship God in a boat? Sure. Worship every day the God of all creation. But none of us can know who the Creator is without God's Word. David asked: *“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.”* (Psalm 24:3f NIV) For such spiritual cleansing that sanctifies the works of our hands we need **God's Work** in Christ.

There's only one place you can find out who the true God is instead of worshipping idols in nature or your portfolio. Only one Person can clean our hands of stinky sins and hard scales on our proud and selfish hearts. This one, true Savior God has kindly provided a faucet for the water of life to quench our thirsty souls of useless work and energy wasted on the world where hearses don't have trailers. God sent Jesus His own Son to be our true Sabbath-**Rest**. **God's Work** on the cross and in the empty tomb takes away the sins of the world and justifies each and every one. But to make that **Rest** our own Jesus graciously invites us: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV)

God has promised to **Give Us Rest** whenever His Word is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered according to His commands. The disciples did not need someone to tell them to pick grain. Hunger compelled what religious people said was wrong. When your friends criticize you for going to church, tell them take a hike – out to the grain fields with Jesus and His disciples. Leave self-righteous pride and trust in Christ alone. **God's Work Gives Us Rest – For serving the Lord**. Come, serve Him with praise in worship for all the good **Work** God has done for us. God's grace in Word and sacrament makes this side of the fence the greatest place to live and work and **Rest** in God's loving kindness and tender mercy. Tell your friends to come on over to God's side in the green. Amen.

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