

The gospel text we are going to read this morning will come from the 2nd and third chapters of Mark. In this text, the gospel writer Mark will describe Jesus taking part in 2 events on the Sabbath.

In our first reading this morning, we heard a reading from Exodus 20 which is a portion of what we commonly call the Ten Commandments. We heard words about remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy and how on six days you are to do your work.

But then the 7th day is set aside to not do any work. This guidance about not working on the Sabbath is given to the family, for any employees or slaves, and no work is to be done by immigrants.

As our first reading showed, this commandment about honoring the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments that goes back to the stories of Creation. The commandment about honoring the Sabbath is the only commandment which connects the Exodus story of God leading the Israelites out of slavery to the story of God creating the world.

For we read in the book of Genesis how God creates for six days but that on the 7th day God chooses to rest. So, this commandment about honoring the Sabbath is vital to the Jewish people that lived during the time of Jesus. Honoring the Sabbath is a key component of the Jewish faith.

So, keep this centrality of the Sabbath in mind as we read this passage of Scripture this morning. For we are going to read two stories where Jesus challenges the meaning and interpretation of Sabbath.

Read Mark 2:23 – 3:6

Maya Bay in Thailand was made famous by the 1999 movie called *The Beach* starring Leonardo DiCaprio. For the past 20 years, this Thai paradise has attracted a daily influx of boats and thousands of visitors yearning to see the beautiful water and unique rock formations.

But beginning this week, that will all change for the next 4 months. The Maya Bay beach is being closed for four months to give its coral reefs and sea life a chance to recover.

This closure is part of a global rethinking about unrestricted tourism to natural places and historic sites. Various countries around the world are becoming aware of how the constant barrage of people is damaging the environment and historic sites.

I've found myself thinking about location Sabbath this week. Since most of us are only here on Sunday you do not get to see how active this building is during the other 6 days of the week. We have close to 100 preschoolers here in the mornings, we have basketball practices in the evenings, we have other ministries like 2 scouting troops that utilize this space.

This is a very busy building with lots of important ministry happening. This church building is such a contrast to many church buildings in our culture which sit idle or are never even used reflecting their glory days gone by.

But this past week it has been rather quiet around this building. Now that we have moved into summer, preschool is not meeting. Scouts are taking a break. There are no basketball practices occurring. There is the occasional meeting taking place.

And I have been reflecting on the quiet in the building and thinking to myself that this building needs a time of Sabbath. It needs a time when very little activity happens within it. It needs a time when there is no noise cascading against the walls.

It needs a time when the floors are not being pounded by small and large feet. It needs a time when lights are rarely turned on and air conditioning units are quiet.

During this time of Sabbath, however, important work is being done to the building to prepare it for what happens next. A couple of rooms inside the building are being converted to a different use, new cleaning staff is coming in to fix it up, and soon the parking lot in front of the sanctuary will receive needed repairs with some expansion to meet our growing needs.

Just like the church building is in a time of Sabbath, the playing fields across the street are also in a time of Sabbath. No games are being played on the fields right now. During this time of Sabbath, the grass is being fertilized and new grass planted. The field needs Sabbath so that it can continue to provide opportunities in the future.

As we think about the earth needing Sabbath and as we think about church buildings needing Sabbath and as we think about fields needing Sabbath, we can now reflect on how we need Sabbath as well. So, let's look back to these passages of Scripture about Sabbath and reflect on what they may teach us.

At first glance, these may be odd passages to read to affirm the importance of Sabbath. After reading the fourth of the Ten Commandments about keeping Sabbath, we read two events from the life of Jesus when he seemed to downplay the importance of Sabbath.

In the stories we read, Jesus sees no problem with affirming people gathering food on the Sabbath which seems to go against strict Jewish teaching. Jesus sees no problem with healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath when he could have easily waited until sun down and abided by the rules.

But if we look at it another way, Jesus re-interprets the commandment about keeping Sabbath and helps all of us see Sabbath keeping as a discipline that frees us up. Sabbath keeping is a revolt against our culture that tries to bind us up. Sabbath keeping is not about following the rules but Sabbath keeping is about coming closer to God by nourishing our soul.

Usually when we think about Sabbath keeping in our culture we think about not working on Sunday and getting to a church worship service on time. But those are ultimately rules that we have created. In the culture of Jesus' day, Sabbath would include a meal together as a family on Friday night and gathering for worship on Saturday while refraining from labor on that Saturday.

According to the words of Jesus that Mark quotes, the Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath. In other words, Sabbath is about our own healing rather than rules to strictly follow.

So, what does Sabbath look like for us? Again, I am going to direct us back to the passage that we read. In this passage, Jesus sees Sabbath as a time to be mindful of our needs for healthy eating. In the story told by Mark, the disciples are hungry on the Sabbath and they pick grains to eat. Jesus affirms it is necessary for them to do this and to not worry about the Sabbath rules.

In our fast-paced lifestyles, many of us are not eating healthy. As a result, our bodies, mind, and spirit are deteriorating. We justify it by saying that we don't have time. But do we? If Jesus gives permission for his disciples to eat for Sabbath, then we may need to do that as well.

Originally, on the Sabbath, Jewish families would find Friday night as a time to share a meal together. How many of us make this a priority? So, keeping Sabbath may mean finding time to cook and eat healthy meals with people that are important to us.

Think about someone that you have been too busy lately to reconnect to? Maybe as part of Sabbath and your own healing you need to find time to eat with someone whom you need to eat with in a relaxed and life-giving way.

The second event that we read about that occurs on the Sabbath is Jesus healing a man with a withered hand. The question that Jesus asks during this encounter is this, "Is it best to do good or harm on the Sabbath? Is it better to save life or kill?"

So, it seems to me that Sabbath keeping is about taking the time to reflect on what we can do that creates and sustains good. We get so wrapped up in the hustle and bustle that we take very little time for reflection. When can you set aside the time to reflect on ways to create and do good?

Sabbath keeping is all about staying focused on God. It's about not abusing God's creation and providing time for earthly restoration. Sabbath keeping is about taking care of the resources including mundane things like building repair and restoration.

When we are able to be Sabbath keepers with ourselves, with others, and with God, then Sabbath becomes our gift to God as well as our gift from God.

Sabbath keeping is about spiritual vitality and freedom. There was a reason that God chose to take Sabbath after creating the world.

There's a reason that we need to take Sabbath as well. AMEN.

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-Thailand info from USA Today article

-Given: June 3, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)