

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you rule over all things in wisdom and kindness. Take away everything that may be harmful and give us whatever is good; through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Alleluia. (Psalm 119:105)

Sermon:

Have you ever felt like a rat in a maze? I'm willing to venture the answer is "yes". Though I must admit that I actually have no idea how a rat in a maze feels, it was at least at one time a common expression for the everyday grind of work or even life. "Welcome to the rat race!" The phrase seeks to encapsulate the endless, unrelenting routine that can come from the pursuit of power, wealth, or fame at work or in life. It's kinda like the old Dunkin Donuts commercial where the guy wakes up every morning before dawn and the sleepily blurts out, "time to make the donuts." Nothing changes, nothing seems exciting. Just run the maze to get to the cheese. Wash, rinse, repeat.

Does Christianity ever feel like that? Just another turn in the rat race of life. (Thursday/Saturday night) Sunday morning ... Let's go to church. Why? Is it like some heavenly time clock that we have to punch in order to get the right amount of hours so that when we close our eyes we'll get to go to heaven? Is it a necessary stopping point in a respectable life as others look in? Is it simply the mindless reply of "I don't know it's just what we do?"

We have opportunity today in our lessons to focus on the Third Commandment. In the Gospel lesson especially, may we see that life, and time with God in His Means of Grace is not another stop in the rat race as we contemplate Jesus' statement to the pharisees, **THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH.**

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do no work as defined by the 613 rules within the pharisaical law ... or at least the pharisees in Israel wanted everyone to think that. That's where our lesson picks up today. One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, 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?"

It was true that on the Sabbath Day, Saturday in Old Testament Israel, Israelites were to refrain from work. The Pharisees of course had twisted the meaning of labor to include plucking a head of wheat and snacking on the kernels while walking along the path. They considered it harvesting. Little did they realize that they were splitting hairs with the one who had theirs all numbered.

More troubling even than their infatuation with accusing Jesus of some wrongdoing though is that they miss the real meaning of the Sabbath Day. What did Luther write? *We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.* The Pharisees missed the boat here. They turned the Commandments of God into tools to earn a place in heaven. In so doing, they emptied them of their real meaning and stripped God's Word of its holiness. The Word of God, Jesus' Himself literally stands before them and they despise Him instead of worshipping Him.

Mark 2:23-28

²³ 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."

Jesus seeks to correct them. He points to the whole incident with Abiathar and David as if to ask the Pharisees if David is then discredited from a place in heaven for this actual mishandling of the consecrated bread (which God condoned). But before they have a chance to even begin to try and negotiate the bind Jesus has placed them in, He fires out the words of our theme: *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

Dear Christian, Jesus is not erasing the law with these words. As if to say, “Go do whatever you want because you’re what’s important and not God’s law.” Instead, He’s setting everything straight once more. The Law of God is not meant to be an endless rat race of unrelenting routine. We were not made for the Law of God. The Law of God is instead something specifically designed for us, for our benefit.

Maybe now is a good time to pause and do some catechetical review. What are the three main uses of the Law of God? There is the curb ... the mirror ... and the guide.

The curb keeps us and a lawless and heathen world in check. Threatening us with punishment as it hems us in and keeps us on the straight and narrow like the old curbs on the road which didn’t simply let you gently veer off the road and into someone’s yard but were meant to, at very least, cause a bump should you fall asleep at the wheel.

The mirror, is also called the chief use of the law because no matter what, it’s present if the Law of God is. Like the mirror in the morning shows me just how hard I slept the night before with pillow lines running over the face, gunk in the eyes and the corners of the mouth, and hair that well seems to have plastered itself to the head wherever it hit the pillow. So, the law exposes every flaw, every mistake, every sin in the heart, mind, and soul.

But the Third use is on display within our lessons today. Not an attempt to earn anything in sight of God, instead this use is solely for the believer, because only the believer knows the truth of our Epistle Lesson. Jesus has fulfilled God’s law for us, not only the Third commandment but all ten of them and that for us. As Paul put it in our second Lesson, *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians 2:13-17)”* Having kept the law for us, having gone to the cross for everyone of our sins, we see the truth, the fulfillment of the Old Testament Shadow.

The Law isn’t there for us to mindlessly mimic in some rat race of an attempt to earn something from God. It’s there because God loves us, so He points us to what is good and away from that which is bad. As our ever-loving Father, He wants us safe, secure and happy not just for a second here on this earth but endlessly with Him in heaven. When we see His love, we want to love Him back which we can do with our obedience freely given not because we have to but because we want to, understanding that even as we do God blesses us abundantly as we follow His holy will.

Dear friends, you are not a rat trapped in the maze of life, meant merely and only to follow one rule after another. You are so much more than that. You are a child of God, purchased and won in the precious blood of the Son of God Himself who has kept the law for you even as He has taken away your sin. As such, you have the privilege and the unthinkable honor of representing Christ in the world around You. The only way we could even begin to do so is if our God, in love, gave us directions for what that looks like. Church is where we gather with our fellow believers to encourage one another, even as God encourages us in His Means of Grace. Why do we seek to do so regularly? Because (Thursday/Saturday/Sunday) isn’t enough to bask in the love of our God, to revel in His forgiveness, to be reminded of the Salvation which belongs to us. Because dear friends, you were not made for the Sabbath, oh no! In fact, it is the other way around, the Sabbath was made for you, for your benefit, that we might bask in the glory of the Gospel, in the depth of God’s great love. Amen!