



SAINT LUKE'S

THE 2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
YEAR B

DEUTERONOMY 5:12-15
2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-12
MARK 2:23-3:6
PSALM 81:1-10

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
JUNE 3, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now as we have entered the long, green season after Pentecost in our Liturgical Year, I want to make a remark to hopefully put the whole of the Liturgical Year into another context. The season of Advent teaches us the importance of watching and waiting and our being hearts being ready to receive God when he comes again in glory. Christmas and Epiphany teach us about recognizing Jesus in our midst and how he is always revealing himself to us. Lent teaches us about repentance and reorienting our lives towards God ~ and making new beginnings with God and with each other. Lent and Holy Week teach us about contrition and lament, about forgiveness and our need to be reconciled with God and with each other. Jesus' resurrection from the dead teaches us that death does not have the final word for him or for us! Easter and the Ascension remind us that the Good News of Jesus Christ isn't only good news for him, but that it is Good News for all of us, as he has raised our human nature to God's presence and God's glory. Pentecost teaches us that Jesus' Spirit descended upon the Church, and that same eternal Spirit of the living Christ is the life force at work in and through us in this world. And also Pentecost teaches us that the Spirit is Jesus' own gift for us who believe. My point in reviewing this is that as we face this long Season after Pentecost, the Church has given us these lessons and teachings throughout the Liturgical Year so that we can practice them together. We build these habits of readiness, watching, waiting, repenting, reorienting, making new beginnings, lamenting, forgiving, and even at the grave making our song alleluia because Jesus broke the bonds of sin and death. We practice them so that we will know how to react when things happen to us. When we are vexed by someone, we have

already had practice forgiving. When we have hurt someone's feelings, we have already had practice saying I'm sorry and making new beginnings. When someone we love dies, we are sustained by God's grace in having already practiced Easter and we have already been assured that death is conquered and does not have final say over our very being. We build holy habits through our use of the Liturgical Year. As we begin this long season after Pentecost, I hope you will look back to what you have experienced in the last year to prepare you to meet what lies ahead ~ and to know how best to respond as a follower of Jesus to challenges as they come up ~ and believe me, they will come up!

One of my favourite things in the whole world is a nap on a Sunday afternoon. In my family growing up, we had a regular pattern on Sundays: get up, go to Church, make lunch at home, and take a nap. Now nap time for us was not optional, just like Church was not optional...mostly because if my brothers and I were not napping, my parents themselves would be unable to nap! My parents instilled in us this pattern on Sundays of worship and rest, of praise and respite. I have now passed this pattern on to my husband, Jonathan, who although reluctant at first, has succumbed to the power of the nap!

In the twenty-first century, with every kind of machines imaginable from ones that wash and dry our clothes, vacuums that operate themselves, dishwashers, cars that park and even drive themselves, electronic gizmos and all sorts of devices that are supposed to alleviate work and free us from labor, I don't know about you, but I feel busier than ever. Our lives fill up with things to do. We have become overworked by doing so much. Being

productive is one thing, being exploited is another. We need boundaries that establish patterns of worship and rest that punctuate our lives to keep us in balance and in good order. We need time to rest. And we need to make Sabbath time a priority in our lives. Remember in Genesis, at the end of Creation, even God takes a rest.

Of all the Ten Commandments, the one about the Sabbath is the most developed. As we hear today in Deuteronomy, even the animals and servants get a day to rest. It was a commandment to make sure no one gets overworked. This Sabbath keeping is one of the most distinctive aspects of Israel's faith. Our Psalm today is a look back at what life was like before the Ten Commandments...or as I like to call them, "The 10 Minimum Requirements for Being Decent." The Psalm recalls what life was like when Israel was enslaved in Egypt. As slaves, there was no time to rest. This Psalm is a reminder of God's deliverance of Israel and warns us of the danger of not being able to have the time for rest that our lives require.

On the flip side, we can also become too rigid about keeping the Sabbath, as we see in our reading from Mark's Gospel. Because keeping the Sabbath was commanded by God, great debate ensued throughout the centuries over what constituted work. It's exhausting to my mind, to spend a day of rest thinking too much and worrying if what I am doing is actually work.

Here at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, today we hear about the disciples picking some grain on the Sabbath and also about Jesus healing the man with a withered hand. These are the 4th and 5th controversies that involve Jesus...the 4th and 5th times Jesus is in trouble with the Pharisees - and guess

what, it's only chapter two of the Mark's Gospel. The Pharisees want to keep the commandments perfectly, but it's also at the expense of their compassion. In the name of piety, the Pharisees had become numb to the loving and faithful purposes of God and insensitive to the suffering of others. This is what made Jesus angry. He was angry at the hardness of their hearts. Jesus' anger was tempered by a godly sorrow for these Pharisees who could no longer rejoice in the token of God's goodness, healing, and love.¹

Jesus sets things in perspective when he says, "The sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." Jesus is not saying that rest is bad, but he is saying that there are more important things than following rules when another person's well-being is concerned. To understand Jesus clearly, we must look carefully at how Jesus acts authoritatively. God's loving and faithful purposes are for the well-being of all humanity. Real human need, not rigid piety, determines the course of human existence.

To understand this line between pious practice and human need is to think with the mind of Jesus, to listen with his ears, to see with his eyes, to speak his words of forgiveness, mercy, healing, and love. To live this way means knowing that we are not the source of power, but it is the very power of God in us. As Paul says in today's epistle, "We do not proclaim ourselves: we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." Paul reminds us that this light, this power within us is the power and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ~ and it does not come from us. We are the vessels, the clay jars, in which the light resides, but we ourselves are not the source of the light and power. That's why we must be careful when we sing

¹ William Lane, Mark's Gospel.

songs like “This Little Light of Mine.” While we have been given Christ’s Light, we need to remember that Jesus is light and we are the candleholder.

From the moment we are born, we are on a trajectory towards death. Death is part of life and there is no escaping it. As Paul says, “So death is at work in us, but life is in you.” Life is in us! As Christians, we live in the greatest hope ever promised: that death does not have the final word and that God’s faithful and loving purposes do not stop after we die. It’s a bold hope – and an audacious claim. But we who have experienced the life-changing power of Jesus Christ in our lives are bursting forth with the power of his light and love can’t help but to share that light and love with a dark and hurting world. Worship and rest are times to reflect on our total dependence on God. Our very lives are a product of God’s will and imagination ~ and being created in God’s image, we are designed for rest and then propelled to worship the risen and living Jesus, the light which has shone in the darkness. May we have the audacity to proclaim this light and life within us as the power of God. And may we always return our thanks and praise to God who is the fountain of life and the very source of our being.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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