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Our Saviour/St. Stephen
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Pentecost 2

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, today, our readings center around the topic of the Sabbath.

They center around the day of rest.

In the lesson from Deuteronomy, we read “observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work...”

And, what I think is so very interesting here in this text is that it says that God **COMMANDED** the people to keep the sabbath.

God had to command the people to take a day of rest, as though the people did know any better, that the people did not know they needed to rest.

PAUSE

And then we have the passage from Mark, in which Jesus sort of undoes the regulations associated with the sabbath, doesn't he?

In that text Jesus' disciples are observed plucking heads of grain.

And the Pharisees, who see this, are up in arms about it.

They exclaim to Jesus, “Why are your disciples doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?”

What are the disciples doing that is so wrong?

Well, in short, Jesus' disciples are doing **WORK** on the sabbath.

Plucking grain could be interpreted as harvesting grain, which was been forbidden on the sabbath.

No work of any kind was to be done on the sabbath, including harvesting.

PAUSE

But then we have that ever so famous line from Jesus.

Jesus says, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath.”

And then our gospel text goes on; Jesus proceeds to enter the synagogue on the sabbath and there is a man there with a withered hand.

And so what does Jesus do, but heal the man?

Which again would be considered “work.”

Jesus isn’t making any friends with these Pharisees, who immediately begin conspiring about how to destroy Jesus.

PAUSE

So what are we to make of the sabbath?

Are we to refrain from doing work on the sabbath, as proscribed in Deuteronomy?

Or, does it depend—can we do SOME work on the sabbath?

PAUSE

But, Friends, there is actually a larger question just below the surface here to which we need to address?

A question that is more important than questions about the sabbath.

And the question is this, “Who is your god?”

PAUSE

If we return to the reading from Deuteronomy, we see that there is a reason why God commands the people to keep the sabbath in the first place?

The text says, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretch arm.”

“Remember.”

Keep the sabbath day to remember.

Keep the sabbath day to remember who is your God.

Keep the sabbath day to remember that your God is the one who liberated you from slavery.

And thus, the day of rest is in like manner a day of liberation.

It is a little day of liberation from work. Your physical faculties—mind and body—are to be freed from having to do work.

Being liberated from work on the sabbath day then is to be a regular reminder of our ancestors’ liberation from slavery.

And in thinking about that liberation from slavery, we remember that it is God who liberated God’s people.

Remember who is your God.

That is what the sabbath day is all about. Remember who is your God.

And this, of course is why worship has come to be associated with the sabbath day.

In worship, we remember who it is we worship, namely God.

PAUSE

But then, we return to our gospel text, and it seems that the regulations surrounding the sabbath day are declared null and void by Jesus.

But, not so fast.

For what is Jesus responding to in both of these scenarios where Jesus is admonished by the Pharisees—first for his disciples harvesting grain, and again for Jesus healing a man with a withered hand?

What is Jesus responding to, but to the situation wherein the Pharisees have made the sabbath day into a god.

Again, remember, what is the underlying question—who is your god?

The Pharisees, it could be argued, have made the Law, the Ten Commandments, into their god.

That is after all the gripe that Jesus has throughout the Gospels with the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.

Which is why in this gospel text Jesus says, “The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.”

Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is ultimately God, not the sabbath.

Again, who is your god?

PAUSE

Now, we might say, “So what?”

What does all this have to do with the price of eggs in China?

Just this...

The Ten Commandments, including the commandment about the sabbath day...the Ten Commandments are the best measuring rod for understanding “Who is your God?”

For we see, the Ten Commandments explain how we make other things into gods.

Power, Greed, Work, even Family, even Religion, can become our god.

Who is your God? is the central, paramount, all-important question.

PAUSE

With respect to the sabbath day...if we neglect the sabbath day...if we fail to take time to rest...well, then our work can indeed become our god.

There are many-a-person who struggle with workaholism, who struggle with the inability to lay aside their work so as to remember to just be—to rest, to worship, to remember God.

Yes, work can become a god.

On the flip side, the commandment about the sabbath day admonishes us so as not to become a zealot either, that is someone who is fanatical about religion.

In this case, religions itself can become a god.

Again, this is why Jesus reminds us that the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.

Jesus is the true God, not religion, not work.

So there you have the false gods associated with the third commandment—workaholism and religious fanaticism.

PAUSE

And it is the same with the other commandments, too.

The other commandments reveal to us the false gods who vie for our attention.

Thou shall not kill. This commandment warns us against allowing POWER to become our god.

This commandment also warns us not to allow the fear of power, or indifference, get the better of us.

Sometimes we need to exert power as individuals, or as a community, or as a nation for the sake of what is right and just.

But at the same time, the lure of power can easily overwhelm us. It is a fine line.

Or consider the commandment, Thou shall not covet.

Greed is another god vying for our attention.

We see something that captures our attention on the television, in the advertisements, and we find greed working on us quickly enough.

We go down through the list, through each of the commandments and each of the commandments gives us an example of how we make false gods of most anything and everything.

Yes, “Who is your God?” It is the paramount question.

So then, what is the solution? How do we keep the true God front and center?

PAUSE

Well, I think, the answer lies in revisiting the Ten Commandments regularly and often.

We revisit the Commandments regularly and often, so that the Ten Commandments might serve as a gauge for how well we are doing.

We should recite the Ten Commandments to ourselves.

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.

Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

Honor thy father and mother.

Thou shall not kill.

Thou shall not commit adultery.

Thou shall not steal.

Thou shall not bear false witness.

And the last two, deal with coveting, Thou shall not covet.

Yes, who is your god? Or, to say it another way, which commandment or commandments trip you up?

For there is where we need to do the hard work of turning from those false gods?

We need to do the hard work of turning from false gods, so that we can come to the point where we find ourselves following the first commandment perfectly—"I am the Lord your God, you shall NO OTHER gods before me."

When we get there, when we get to the point of following the first commandment perfectly, all the other commandments will fade away, because then we will be remembering God, we will be worshipping God, not just Sunday, but everyday, and every hour of every day, and we will be obediently fulfilling God's will in the world. Thanks be to God. AMEN.