

Midweek Lent
March 15, 2017
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Matthew 11:28,29 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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.

The Third Commandment: “Love Time with God”

You know what day it is. The one day of the week that is different than all the others. So you don’t immediately scamper around preparing for work or school, rushing through normal chores and routines. Everything about this day screams ‘this is a special day!’ And that was by design. When he first gave the 10 Commandments, the third was very clear: **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”** (Exodus 20:8) The other six days were for service. All the work needed to be done in those six days. Every seventh day of the week was designed to be different. Special. Set apart by God for God.

God designed it to be a day of rest. That what the word “sabbath” means. Rest. So the Sabbath day meant resting, refraining from work. And that must have been a welcome change from the other days of the week. It must have been refreshing. To just drop everything and focus on God’s creation, God’s power, God’s care, and God’s ongoing work in their lives.

But it wasn’t always treated that way. You know what happens when you have to do something different, something special. After you’ve done it over and over and over again, it stops being so special. It becomes routine. It’s just something you do. And when you actually do stop to think about why you are doing what you’re doing, you can easily get a little annoyed. You can think about all the things you don’t get to do on this seventh day, the things you can’t do. You can start to feel like you’re missing out. Deprived, like God is shortchanging you one day each week.

And when you start to think about something different, something special like that, you are left with the choice. Do you do it anyway and just go through the motions? Or do you give up and do your own thing? You can follow the commands and instruction and do what you are supposed to do. But then you won’t be able to help yourself from thinking about everything you’re giving up. so it becomes a sacrifice. Something you are doing for God. Even if you’d rather not being doing it at all, you can go through the motions of outward obedience to avoid any real trouble.

For believers today we have freedom. First of all, how do we get that freedom? We get some subtle hints. As Jesus began his ministry, he had a routine. We hear: **“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”** (Luke 4:16) As God, Jesus didn’t have to do anything he didn’t want to do. He wrote the laws. He could have brushed them aside. But instead, he fulfilled them all.

We have freedom in Christ. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, including the Third Commandment. We are no longer under obligation to set aside Saturday as our Sabbath. There is no command for us to set aside one day each week to refrain from work and take our rest.

And because of his perfect obedience, we have a different kind of rest. Jesus 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, and you will find rest for your souls.”** (Matthew 11:28,29) So the question for believers today is ‘what do we do with all that freedom?’ We say we love God about everything else. But what do we do with that love for God? What are our hearts really drawn to? Not just our official position and what we tell everyone, but what is actually most important to us in practice? And just like all the other commandments, the Third Commandment is really an issue of the heart. More important than what we actually do, is the attitude of our hearts that influence all our actions.

If you really want to know the condition of your heart, try this exam: Do you think of worship more like going to the dentist or like basketball practice? You know you are supposed to go to the dentist. It’s good for you. And so you go. Even though you would rather not, because it’s better than not going. Basketball practice is a little different. It’s not always easy. It’s not always fun. But we do it. We want to go. We go because we know that practice will make future practices easier and games more fun. We want to go. We are eager for the training. We move other things out of our schedules so we get to go to practice.

So how do we get out of the dentist appointment mentality toward worship and God’s Word? How do we keep ourselves from falling into the same pitfalls the Israelites did when God gave them the special, different Sabbath day? The first step is to realize we are soaking in unhealthy messages about time. We are marinating in a mentality in our culture that says time is yours. Time belongs to you. It’s yours so you choose what to do with it, how you want to give it away, how you want to spend it, how you plan to enjoy it. And the subliminal message is that you can be happy only when you use time your way. Your time is precious and so guarding and protecting it and having control over what you choose to do with it will show you are really in charge of your life.

That’s quite different than the message God gave his people when he first instructed them with the commandments. He told them why they were to set aside time as special: **“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”** (Exodus 20:11) Time is made by God. Time is set aside for a special purpose by God. And God gives you time to connect with him, to celebrate the gift he has given to you.

And because we have a different perspective on time, we also have a different goal for life. Our lives are times for us to draw closer to God. God wants to give us his gifts. God wants us to find rest in his redeeming love. We have real “rest” when our hearts are rightly ordered to the ultimate end, Jesus.

Every other message in life tells us we are what we do. Your value and your purpose comes from what you work at and accomplish. Worship is primarily about receiving God's good gifts. Worship tells us we are what is given to us. Worship slows down our lives and our schedules and our plans so we can be Mary instead of Martha. We sit at the feet of Jesus to receive his Word. Instead of getting so worried and so upset about so many things, we put life on hold for the one thing needful. Jesus feeds us with his good news. Jesus takes the time to share his forgiveness and his grace with you. That re-writes the definition of a good life, a productive life, a meaningful life.

Something strange happened between my freshman and senior year of high school. As a freshman, I dreaded going to football practice. Maybe it was because I was about 5'4" and I know one of the bigger players was going to pulverize me sometime during practice. But in the summer before my senior year, I couldn't wait for the season to start. I was out working hard and training all summer long. And so when training camp opened, it was fun. At the end of a practice, I was exhausted and soaked in sweat. But I was also exhilarated. Practice had given birth to a habit. That habit made me want to practice and made me excited about what that practice would produce.

You've probably experienced the same thing with another sport. Or maybe a diet. Or really anything you knew was worth it, but was just hard to take the first step. It was struggle to get going. But once you did, you might not have discovered immediate enjoyment. But over time, your habits changed your heart. And so as Christians we train our loves. We put in conscious effort to overturn the dominant cultural messages and default habits bombarding us from every side. Our habits change our hungers. Our hungers show our hearts have been changed.

Whenever we make use of God's Word, that is holy time. Whenever we are hearing and learning God's Word, that a sacred moment. The practices of Christian worship train our love in our life. We begin by acknowledging we have come into God's presence. But that isn't reserved for one or two hours each week in this building. We are honest to God about who we really are and what we have really done. We submit ourselves to God's patient instruction in his Word. We respond with prayer and praise and song. We are fed with God's forgiveness. We are sent with God's blessing and protecting presence.

It is different. It is special. It is your life. Your time. Set apart by God for God. Amen.