

Resolutions

You Might Not Have Thought Of

Sermon-Based Study Guide

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Mark 2.23-28, Exodus 16, 1st Samuel 21

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I. Connecting With One Another

Describe your favorite, most life-giving activity to do on a day off, when there's no work to do, or leaves to rake, or laundry to fold. Why do you enjoy this activity so much?

II. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our New Year series, "Resolutions You Might Not Have Thought Of." Last week we discussed the deep spirituality of eating together, both at everyday meals, at the Communion table, and taking in - ingesting! - God's Word together.

This study, and in our worship gatherings on Sunday morning, we will look at a second resolution: Sleeping In, by which we mean, Sabbath! Taking a day off to rest, to put our feet up, is part of God's original design, seen in Creation. Why, then, is it so hard for us to do!?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Exodus 16.

This is one of the earliest accounts of God's instruction to His people to take Sabbath. What strikes you about the context in which Sabbath originally came about? Is anything surprising? Confusing?

b. Why do you think the Sabbath command was instituted while the Israelites were grumbling? What does this tell us about God?

c. Reread Exodus 16.27-30. Why do you think Moses was angry with the Israelites?

What do you make of the statement, "the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days"?

d. How would you explain this passage to someone who has never heard of Sabbath? How is practicing Sabbath different than merely taking a day off?

e. Turn to Mark 2, reading verses 23-28.

Sometimes it seems like the Pharisees were the first century Big Brother, always around a corner, watching Jesus and his disciples. Truth be told, the Pharisees were an unofficial group, with some devout holy members living out their faith by studying the Scriptures and feeding the poor while others were busy keeping an eye on everyone else, making sure they follow all the rules!

Are there ways that Christians can sometimes seem like *those kind* of Pharisees in today's culture? How can we combat that negative stereotype?

f. In verse 24, the Pharisees declare that Jesus and his disciples are doing something "unlawful on the Sabbath." This sense of law comes from passages like Exodus 31.12-18.

Read Exodus 31.12-18, noticing the connection between holiness and taking Sabbath. Why do you think the punishment for not observing Sabbath was so harsh?

How does the Sabbath mark us as different from others?

How is practicing Sabbath a mark of faith?

- g. Back in Mark 2.25, Jesus references not Exodus, but 1st Samuel 21, to justify his disciples' actions. In 1st Samuel 21, David had been anointed by Samuel as King, though Saul, who was trying to do away with David because of his jealousy, still sat on the throne (pick up the story in chapter 18, if you're interested). While on the run from Saul, David received consecrated bread from Ahimelek the priest. N.T. Wright explains the significance of Jesus referencing this story:

Jesus' reply is a bit of a tease, but packs a strong punch. He doesn't deny that the disciples are out of line with traditional sabbath observance, but he pleads special circumstances and scriptural precedent. He puts himself on a par with King David in the period when David, already anointed by Samuel but not yet enthroned (because Saul was still king), was on the run, gathering support, waiting for his time to come. That's a pretty heavy claim: the implication is that Jesus is the true king, marked out by God (presumably in his baptism) but not yet recognized and enthroned. He therefore has the right, when he and his people are hungry, to by-pass the normal regulations.

How does this explanation help you understand Jesus' concluding statement, that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath?

- h. If, then, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, how do you understand "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Does that mean we can choose to observe it or not? How does our allegiance to Jesus inform the role of Sabbath in our lives?
- i. True Sabbath, of course, is not merely rest, but rest in God's presence. In other words, Sabbath includes worship. In her book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*, Ruth Haley Barton writes,

Little by little under Moses' shepherding care, the people learned how to enter into this shared discipline that built lessons about trust into the very rhythms of their lives. Every week the whole community entered into this exercise in trust together. Every week the community gave in to their need for rest, believing that if they did this God would continue to care for their needs. Every week the whole community used the space created by not working to turn itself toward God. Through this very concrete discipline, they lived out their belief that somehow the work they could accomplish in six days would be enough and God could be trusted with running the world while they rested. This daily and weekly rhythm was their earliest pattern for their life together in God's presence, and it shaped their identity as individual souls and as a community. It taught them how to honor God with the time of their lives.

How does this help you understand the importance of Sabbath - and worship - in our communal life today?

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to teach us, as a community, the importance of a daily and weekly rhythm of Sabbath.
- b. Lift up the children and students travelling to Forest Home's Winter Camp this weekend, praying that the Triune God would meet them each in their place of need.
- c. Pray for our continuing dismissal process from the PC(USA), that we would be led by His Spirit.