

Prayer: Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

**Mark 2:23-3:6**

2:23 One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

2:24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?"

2:25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?"

2:26 He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions."

2:27 Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath;

2:28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

3:2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

3:3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."

3:4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

3:5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

3:6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

**Proclamation of the Word**

It's number 4 in the Big 10- No, I am not talking about an Athletic Conference. The Ten Commandments.

No. 4 reads, "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy."

Remember going back to creation, God worked for six days, and on the seventh God rested. This summer you and I will be exploring the meaning of Sabbath and the Sabbatical year. It will take us all summer to perhaps understand it! So for today's purposes, "sabbath is about participating in and anticipating God's rest and God's justice for all."<sup>1</sup>

Now many of us grew up in a time of Blue Laws or Sabbath laws built into our Civic Life. Blue laws forbade stores, gas stations, banks, or restaurants opening. Families required children to refrain from fun- no cards, games, movies. At home, no work was to be done. There were no sports on Sunday. In my experience, Sundays were for worship, big dinners, naps, funny papers for me, the full paper for my parents, and visiting relatives or friends. I admit Sundays could be boring...until 7:00pm when the Wonderful World of Disney aired a movie on TV.

I remember after I had grown, my mother admitted that she sometimes mowed on Sundays, but only the back yard, lest she cause a brother or sister to stumble. Just kidding. Not really. So folks would not talk about Joyce Smith mowing on Sunday afternoons.

In some ways maybe we all became like the Pharisees in today's Scripture who were more concerned with the law rather than the purpose of Sabbath. The lawyers, the Pharisees, try to trap Jesus for they have heard of his miracles and forgiving of sins. They do not like him one bit, so they set out to DESTROY him. Jesus says to the disciples after he feeds them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

I know my mother worked full-time and cared for the house and yard by herself. Sometimes she was behind on her work at home. She had no slaves or manservants (except my brothers). The rhythm of rest, worship, and work was adapted.

The temptation of overcoming strict Sabbatarian laws or blue laws may have led us to swing too far the other way. Once I learned by reading Mark 2 that Sabbath was made for humankind, that means ME, right? Anything goes! Sin boldly! We are free to indulge the day with recreation of all kinds, skip worship if we don't feel like it, and work ourselves to death. Praise God!

Jesus has a deeper meaning in mind. He doesn't want to destroy the sabbath, but to restore it to its true purpose. Sabbath is about participating in and anticipating God's rest and God's justice for all! And in Mark's gospel sabbath is when the Son of Man liberates people from demonic powers. The Pharisees probably thought the man with the withered hand could wait one more day to be healed and set free, but Jesus knew the man's liberation from his struggles would lead him to healing and maybe even praise and worship of God.

We read in Deuteronomy 5:15 *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 outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.*

Sabbath is liberating. We are no longer slaves, but free to worship and enjoy God. Sabbath time girds us, frees us, draws to God.

*In his book Kaddish, Leon Wiseltier reports on his decision, after his father died, to observe the practice of reciting the mourner's kaddish, a psalm-like acclamation that is said every day for many months*

*after the death of a loved one. The process involves going to a synagogue and wrapping phylacteries around one's arms, leather bands with box-like chambers containing words of the Torah, and then reciting the kaddish. It is an arduous discipline, perhaps much like the sabbath. But one morning, Wiseltier reports, "I am standing in my phylacteries at dawn, and suddenly they feel different. They do not bind me, they gird me."*

Sabbath girds us. We rest in God's holy time and worship. In sabbath we participate in and anticipate God's rest and justice for all. This week I heard a healing and liberating story.

Story: Father Greg Boyles was invited to give the Commencement address at Pepperdine this year.<sup>ii</sup> Father Greg received a call from the President.

"Greg, do you believe in free speech?"

"Yes."

"Good, you're giving one on April 28."

Father Greg, a Jesuit priest, is the founder of *Homeboy Industries*- a mission that keeps gang members employed and transforms lives in Los Angeles. Their motto is "Nothing stops a bullet like a job." Located in the deadliest part of L.A. due to gang activity, for 30 years this community effort has changed lives. *Homeboy Industries* is a system of services and business initiatives. One is *Home Boy Bakery*- where former enemies bake and sale bread. Talk about life giving work! Like David and his friends fleeing enemies, they found the bread of the Presence in the synagogue and ate!

They were invited by Gonzaga University to come speak. Greg and two homies, Bobby and Mario, who worked in the bakery and merchandise store, respectively, headed to Gonzaga. He describes Mario as the most tattooed person in the 30 years history. Arms sleeved out. Neck blackened with the name of his gang. Head shaved covered in tattoos. Forehead, cheeks, chin, and eyelids that read "The end" so that when he is lying in the coffin, there is no doubt. As they walk through the airport, mothers are clutching their kids and people are avoiding them. Ftr. Greg says he forgets that others see only the tattoos. If you were to go to *Homeboy Bakery* on Monday and ask who is the kindest most gentle soul, they won't say Father Greg, they would say Mario.

Father Greg says, "He's proof that only the soul that ventilates the world with tenderness has any chance of changing the world."

One night at Gonzaga, Father Greg says, "I'm done talking. It's your turn." They were terrified to have the stage to themselves. They told stories of terror, torture, violence and abuse of every imaginable kind. The audience stood in awe of what these two had carried in their lives rather than in judgment at how they carried it. There were no Pharisees with hardened hearts. He said, "If their stories had been flames, you would have to keep your distance otherwise you would get scorched."

In front of 1000 people, the Q and A time came and a woman said, "I have a question for Mario." Mario stands at the microphone scared to death. He's clutching the microphone.

She asked, "When you say you're a father and you have a son and daughter about to enter their teenage years. What advice do you give them? What wisdom do you impart to them?"

Mario clutches the mic, terrified and trembling, when finally he blurts out, "I just"

He stops and retreats, unable to go on, but he wants to get the whole sentence out.

"I just don't want my kids to turn out to be like me!"

And there is silence until the woman who asks the question stands, crying, says,

"Why would you not want your kids to turn out to be like you? You are loving. You are kind. You are gentle. You are wise. I hope your kids turn out to be like you."

And a thousand total perfect strangers stand and will not stop clapping. And all Mario can do is hold his face in his hands so overwhelmed with emotion in that room full of people. Mario returned to himself, and they returned to themselves.

Father Greg says, "I think that is the only praise God has any interest in."

Human liberation and restoration looks like this.

In sabbath we participate in and anticipate God's rest and justice for all.

We are girded, strengthened to participate in God's healing, restoration work of the people of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Long, Tom, "Reflections on a Sabbath Way of Life" in *Christian Century*, weekly email on Lectionary.

<sup>ii</sup> To learn more go to [www.pepperdine.edu/news/2016/04/homeboy-industries-founder-greg-boyle-speak-2016-pepperdine-bible-lect](http://www.pepperdine.edu/news/2016/04/homeboy-industries-founder-greg-boyle-speak-2016-pepperdine-bible-lect)<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AC5c7VQoARcures/> and to watch the speech go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AC5c7VQoARc>