



Do You Have Time or Does Time Have You?

TEXT
Mark 3:1-6

May 27, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

The tension in this text is because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Sabbath was a day of worship; it was a day of rest. Healing a neighbor could wait, should wait, according to them.

The Hebrew scriptures refer to this day as the Sabbath. In the early church, in recognition of Easter, the day of worship was moved to Sunday and called the Lord's Day. This is a day set apart from other days.

Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. There was a man with a withered hand. Jesus healed him. It made the preachers mad. They said, "That's not what this day is for. This is a day of rest. To heal is to work. You are violating the Lord's commandment. You can't do that today."

It sounds silly.

I asked my grandmother if we could go to the pool. She said, "Of course not." First of all, the pool wasn't open on Sunday. She was right about that. Blue laws in those South Carolina days closed the pool and the grocery store — just about everything but the church. She continued, "Even if the pool was open, no child of this house will go to the pool

on Sunday. Sunday is a day of rest. Just watching you in the pool wears me out. It's out of the question."

In time, we would be allowed to put on our swimsuits and run through the sprinkler, but only in the back yard. Even then, I admit that my grandmother sounded more like the Pharisees in this text than she sounded like Jesus — a reality that would have shocked her.

So, what's this about? My grandmother was not wrong about this. This is a day of rest. Some of you are sleeping right now. It's faithful — maybe not the most faithful option, but it's faithful.

We all need rest. You just can't go forever. I know so many of you who are always running on fumes. You push and push; we are driven to accomplish and produce and succeed and create. We are overscheduled, overbooked, overstretched and overworked.

Diana Butler Bass, a scholar of contemporary Christian practices, notes that the Sabbath commandment is treated differently from others. She says, while we may break all of the Ten Commandments, breaking the Sabbath is the only one we will brag about

breaking. We would be happy to observe the Sabbath, but we simply do not have time.¹

Rest is spiritual work. I will share this with you with an admitted degree of embarrassment. Several years ago, I realized I had worked for about four years without a regular day off. I took time off, but I had no rhythm of rest. I couldn't, you understand; I was just too important to be away. I was young and strong. But slowly, without question, I was getting depressed. My life was great. My work was meaningful. But I was grumpy. I was unfulfilled, no fun to be around. I was depressed because I was exhausted, not just of body but of spirit.

Rest is spiritual work.

Let me ask you something: How many of you have a way to check your email right now? Don't fib! I can see the light of your phone reflecting in your glasses. How many of you were at dinner sometime this week and stopped to take a phone call on your cell or stopped to text a friend? How many of you took some vacation, but checked your email every day?

One of the realities today is that our set "apart time" is blurred. There was a time when

work time was more clearly work and home time more clearly home, but that time is behind us now. Today our work can be with us all the time. We don't have time; time has us.

One of the realities of being a child of God instead of being God is we have to rest. It is spiritual work. But it's more than that too. If this day were only about rest, then the subtle implication is that we rest. Why? So that we can go back to work.

That would imply that to be human is to work. Well, work is good and meaningful and life-giving. But we are not human because we work. We are human because we love.

One student of the text wrote, "For contemporary Christians the issue is less a matter of ceasing work ... and more a matter of perceiving time properly."² That's it. The Sabbath commandment is less about work and more about time. At the root of the Sabbath commandment is the calling to recognize that every day is God's gift, and we need to use the day for its ultimate purpose. God gives the Sabbath that we might remember the purpose of our lives.

My friend Ellen Skidmore, a preacher in South Carolina, once said, "Sabbath observance may be our most significant ethical work."³ I think she is right.

The Lord's Day is not just about this day; it is about every day. This is the day set apart that we might remember and understand the purpose of all other days. The point is not

just to get this day right, but to get every day right. It is about the purpose of time, the gift of time, the use of time, the living of time.

And that purpose? Well, you know that: to love God and to love your neighbor. This day reminds us that we are defined by our relationships. But that is so easy to forget.

In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch is a defense attorney. Atticus is also raising two children, Jem and Scout. Scout gets probation for fighting in school. She says, "I was far too old and too big for such childish behavior. But," she says, "Cecil Jacobs made me forget." He announced in the school the day before that Scout's Daddy defended blacks. [Cecil used another word.] "I denied it," said Scout. ... "But I asked Atticus, 'Do you defend blacks?'" [Scout used another word.]

"Of course, I do. Don't say that word, Scout. That's common."

"It's what everybody at school says."

"From now on it'll be everybody less one."

"Well, if you don't want me to grow up talkin' that way, why do you send me to school?"⁴

If you go to school, if you go to work, if you go at all, there will be voices that will pull you away from yourself, draw you away from your purpose. And our purpose is to love God with all that we are and to love your neighbor as yourself. The Lord's Day is

not just about rest. It is the day to invest in your primary relationships — God and neighbor. That is not only what the Sabbath is for, that is what every day is for.

You are going to give yourself away this week. You want to give yourself to that which matters.

I heard the story of a man who was an antique shopper in New York. He was in a store, and he spotted an ancient Chinese dish from the Ming Dynasty — invaluable. It was clear that the owner of the antique store didn't recognize its value because he was using it as a milk bowl for his cat. This guy saw a bargain. He said, "That's a great cat you have there."

"Oh, he's not much, just keeps the mice away."

"No, no, I like that cat. What would you take for the cat?"

"Oh, I'm gonna keep him."
"How about \$500?"

"For the cat?"

"Yes, I want that cat. OK? Tell you what, just so he is comfortable with me ... if I throw in an extra \$10, how about let me take that milk bowl?"

The owner said, "No can do, that's the greatest treasure in the store. You wouldn't believe it, but that dish is pottery from the Ming Dynasty. I can't part with that. Enjoy the cat."

Here's the point. You are going to give your day away to something. You want to make sure you give it to that which matters.

Jesus looks at a man with a withered hand. “Stretch it out.” He does. That is a good thing to do on any day. Mercy is always holy. Compassion is always holy. Generosity is always holy. Of course, in the day-to-day work of living, we forget. We lose the purpose of our lives. We think we can be attentive to our faith on another day. We can love our neighbor on another day. We need a day to remind us what our time is for.

My friend Michael, when his daughter was a teenager, she was quite gifted in gymnastics and other abilities which placed her on the cheerleading squad. Michael, also a pastor, said he stopped by the school to pick her up after a game. He picked up a minivan load of middle school girls, all talking at the same time. He asked, “So, who did you all play tonight?” Not a one of them knew.

“Well, who won the game?”

“We don’t know.”

He pushed even further: “What sport did they play?”

“We don’t know.”

Now you may think they were just flighty cheerleaders, but they may be the only ones at that game, whatever game it was, who really got it. Most would have gone home remembering the score, perhaps remembering a play, but Michael’s daughter spent the time in friendship. She knew what was important.

We need this day to remind us what the rest of the days are for.

Sabbath observance is a commandment — right next to don’t steal and don’t kill and don’t lie. Do not forget what time is for.

¹Sherman, p. 48

²Robert Sherman, *Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest: Interpretation* (Vol. 59, No. 1), January 2005, p. 39

³The Rev. Ellen Skidmore, of Columbia, SC

⁴Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), p. 79

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The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.