

St. Bartholomew 13th Sun after Pente August 22, 2010

Luke 13:10-17

The theme for our HOPE service today is "Keeping Sabbath" - and it relates to our gospel lesson. In our gospel reading, Jesus significantly reinterprets the Jewish understanding of Sabbath. They felt that you could do absolutely no work on the Sabbath - and yet, Jesus says you can always do GOOD work on the Sabbath - you can always do mercy, even on the Sabbath.

Our theme for today is "Keeping Sabbath". The Sabbath was originally from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Well, in the early days of Christianity, we decided to take Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection - as our day of worship and rest, instead of the Jewish Saturday.

But we still do not observe this day of rest as a commandment. For us, it is more of a recommendation - you should take this day of rest - whether it is on Sunday or Saturday or Monday or Friday - You should take this day of rest and worship because it will create goodness in your life. Observing a day of rest and reflection with God, will bring a blessedness to your life that will certainly be missing otherwise. You can get around it, you can avoid it, you can ignore it - but God has built this need for mental and spiritual and physical rest - God has built this need into you and into

all of creation. The Torah even commands farmers to give the land a rest and let it lie dormant for a certain time.

So, what do we mean when we say, "Keeping Sabbath"? Since we do not have a strict religious definition for Sabbath, I can only give you a general outline of my own. And I just want you to know that I am not always that good at keeping Sabbath either - but like I said, it promises to bless you when you can keep it.

So, here is what a Sabbath could look like. It is a day where you do NOT do the job that you do during the rest of the week. If you fix computers during the week, then you would NOT fix computers on your day of rest. If you build or repair houses during the week, then you would NOT build or repair houses on your day of rest. The same would also be true for housework - so you actually have to prepare in advance to have a real Sabbath rest.

However, you CAN do work that you enjoy. Work that is refreshing to your spirit. Some people might enjoy gardening as a way to relax and get in touch with the earth. Some people might enjoy doing art or writing letters or reading books or visiting their grandchildren as a way to relax and enjoy the life that God has given you. You might enjoy washing the car or baking some cookies.

But whatever you choose to DO during your day of rest - you should also create a certain amount of time where you do NOT do anything but sit and observe nature - or sit and consider your life or the world. One person that I have been reading lately, Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book An Altar in the World - she recommends that you take a full 20 minutes if you can.... To just sit there. Do you know how long 20 minutes is when you are just sitting there? And you might be surprised what you notice.

You might notice that there are an awful lot of leaves on the trees around you. And the beautiful way that the light shimmers when the leaves flutter. Or how the gap between houses provides you with a spectacular view of distant spaces. You know nature can be amazingly beautiful if you just stop and look at it some time. And that beauty is everywhere throughout you life.

Or you might notice how playful squirrels can be - running all over the yard, the fence, and the tree trunks. Isn't it interesting how God enables even the animals to have times of play. And have you seen how butterflies dance in their mating ritual? And rabbits are actually pretty smart - they know exactly how far the dog's chain goes.

And while you are sitting there observing nature or the history of your life - you might find yourself having a full-body experience of the presence of God. A moment so holy that

you realize that you have discovered what the prophets felt in the presence of God. The thing about it is, you have to take the time. You have to set some time aside - to be open to God.

Now, some people have more of a need to move around rather than sit. So they might enjoy taking a walk through Codorus Park or ride a bike on the rail trail or go fishing or lazily kayak on the lake.

Either way, whether it is doing something active or simply sitting to observe - this is a kind of worship - a kind of getting in touch with God, outside of all of the worries and pressures of the everyday. Many people don't realize that when the first Sabbath commandment was given - it wasn't just so you could not work for a day. Part of the command was that you should take time to worship God.

Another interesting thing about choosing to observe a day of rest - you might get bored. And that's OK. You might get so bored that you actually go over and visit with someone - whether a neighbor or family members. You might even learn to play board games or cards with your children. In years not long ago, people used to actually go a visit their extended family Sunday afternoon. And they would tell stories and sing hymns.

And that boredom, might actually make you more eager when you do get to go back to doing your regular work - just like a

vacation, can make you more anxious to get back to and appreciate your daily routines.

And if you take this day of rest, it also gives new life to the rest of the week. It breaks up the rest of the week. You can look forward to your day of rest during the week - and you can fondly remember what you experienced during your last day of rest.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus implies that there is another way to observe the Sabbath - and that is, in doing good for someone else. Whether it is in taking them to the doctor - in watching their children for them... Whether it is in just visiting them or in bringing them to church. Jesus implies that this is also a valid way to observe the Sabbath.

The theme for today's HOPE service is "Keeping Sabbath". And it may seem like a sort of light topic. I hope I have given you a decent overview of how you might choose to keep Sabbath in some manner in your life. But I do want you to know, that this is not a "light" topic. God built it in to the primary 10 commandments. To take one day out of the week and make it holy..... And even though we don't slavishly observe the commandments - there is a special blessing built into forcing yourself, as best you can, to take a Sabbath rest. Some things of faith you cannot understand simply by talking about them. Sometimes you simply have to do them, to truly understand.

May Jesus bless you with wonder and joy as you try to
rediscover what it means to do Sabbath. Amen