

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 14:1-11

Honor the Sabbath. Use Your Place in Life for Your Neighbor and to God's Glory

Jesus makes two important points in our Holy Gospel. The first regards how we properly honor the Sabbath. The second regards how we properly fulfill our place in life.

First, the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a subject of much confusion still in our day, even as we see it was in our Holy Gospel. There are some today who still require a New Testament observance of the Sabbath, such as the Seventh Day Adventists. While most of Christendom has adopted Sunday as the Lord's Day, as we see was the case in the New Testament Church of the Apostles, such churches insist that Christians must observe the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, avoiding work and observing worship on that day. Hence, Seventh Day Adventists worship on Saturdays. Interesting, that's why a number of mission churches rent their facilities for Sunday services.

Orthodox Jews still today also are still confused regarding the Sabbath, which is understandable, since they are still confused about Christ, rejecting Him as the Messiah. They too require a strict observance of their interpretation of the Old Testament law. They forbid work on Saturday, from dusk on Friday to the appearance of a certain number of stars on Saturday night. In fact, one friend of mine who had travelled to Israel told me that in some hotels there the elevators stop on every floor on the Sabbath, so that the religious Jews can avoid work by pressing the buttons, thus breaking the Sabbath in their opinions. I was skeptical, but looked it up, and sure enough he was right. They're, called Sabbath elevators.

Jesus leaves no doubt about the purpose of the Sabbath today. The purpose of the Sabbath is to hear God's Word and then to put it into practice; not to grant it lip-service like a hypocrite and put off the works that God has prepared in advance for us to walk in for another time. Indeed, any sort of rest that would keep us from helping our neighbor in his need and thus honoring God is nothing but the rest of the devil. Jesus said to the Pharisees who were trying to trap Him, "*Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?*" Are not our neighbors much more important than livestock?

While Sunday has been set aside at the Lord's Day in the New Testament, there are times when some Christians are unable to gather on that day because of godly obligations, as they fulfill their God-given vocations. They do not sin in such a case, so long as they are not despising God's Word and seek to gather with their fellow believers at another time as they are able, such as in a Monday night service in our case. But they do sin if they fail to use their vocations, their places in life, to love and serve their neighbor, not only on Sunday, but every day, and if they neglect the preaching and the study of God's Word. Only through God's Word can we truly serve our neighbor, and if we fail to serve our neighbor when we've been instructed by God's Word we haven't truly and entirely taken it to heart.

The second point Jesus makes regards our place in life. "*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,*" He says. Remember the life of Saul in the Old Testament, for instance. A lowly young man from lowly tribe of Benjamin, a man searching for his father's donkeys when the Lord called him to be king, he was raised to the throne of Israel, made its first king. God wanted him to rule for the good of His beloved people, to prosper the nation through wise decisions and selfless service as their head, as a husband is also called to serve for the benefit of his family as the head of his household. Yet what did Saul do? He did what many who rise to positions of power, or even to rather powerless positions where they

yet have at least a little power over another, often do: he let it go to his head. Saul, rather than ruling for the benefit of Israel and God's glory, ruled for his own glorification, for his own benefit. His ego got the best of him, and he ended up losing the throne for his son and committing suicide on the battlefield, as the Lord anointed the humble shepherd-boy David to take his place.

One thing about being a pastor, is that oftentimes people don't quite know what to make of you. I remember how people looked at me at my ten year high school reunion when they found out I was a pastor, and I don't think it was only because of shock that Wade had become a pastor. I could tell that the wheels were turning in their heads to see if they'd said anything inappropriate. And, while a minute earlier we were shooting the breeze just like in the old days, once my call was out there, they got quiet, or at least a lot more formal. It happens all the time. People often become unsure around a pastor. "Pray for me," they mumble, or they act as if we're some sort of holy men because we're called workers—unless Tricia's with me to put that notion to rest—and it can easily go to our heads. We can begin to buy into the hype and get good to putting on such a show.

I'll let you in on something: I hate being called "Reverend." When I get mail that says "Reverend," I want to throw it out. When people ask what title to use when introducing me for something or when putting my name in print for some reason, I always ask that they not call me "Reverend." I much prefer "Pastor," and for a very specific reason: "Reverend" calls a status to mind, while "Pastor" calls a responsibility to mind. I've not been called as a pastor to seek honor for myself, though God does bid His people to show His called servants honor, but rather I've been called to shepherd, and not to shepherd as one set apart from the sheep because of my own inherent holiness, but as a fellow forgiven member of Christ's flock desperately in need of the very thing I've been called to give God's people, as was the case also with St. Peter when he was restored to his office as an Apostle. I've been called to give you God's mercy and forgiveness and Christ's new life through Word and Sacrament, even as I myself need daily to receive it.

Such is the case with every Christian. If you are laboring for titles and honors, for awards and glory, you are most definitely not serving your Lord and your neighbor but yourself, and in so doing you sully any title and honor, award and glory you receive. You are exalting yourself, and the Lord will humble you in his due time. No, we do well to serve in humility, even as our Jesus did when He became man and walked among us, seeking not our own benefit but the benefit of our neighbor and the glory of God through the places in life in which the Lord has set us, or as we seek positions in life through hard work and study where we think we might better and best serve our neighbor and honor God with our gifts and abilities.

And Christ was no Pharisee. He was not talking out of both sides of His mouth, talking a good talk without walking the walk. No, He fulfilled the Sabbath by dutifully hearing His Father's Word and obeying it, by perfectly loving us and glorifying His Father, even giving His life and resting in a grave on the Sabbath to free us from slavery to sin, death, and the devil, a slavery that turns the Sabbath into an excuse for laziness and our places in life into opportunities for selfish gain. And He did not use His place as the Son of God to seek His own benefit, but became the least of men on the earth, and as the Son of God gave His life to ransom us, to do what we could never do, even in a million years in hell: pay for the sins of the world.

May God grant us the grace to do for our neighbor and for Him what He has done for us in Christ, and when we fall short, may we always return to Him who is our Sabbath, our eternal rest, for a new beginning and the strength to press on in His service. Amen.