
Announcement re: Ordinary time given at the beginning of the service.¹

When I first moved to Orange City, Iowa, someone asked me if there was a drain in my garage. That seemed a rather odd question. But I said, yes, as a matter of fact there was a drain in my garage.

They said, “You’re in luck, you can wash your car on Sunday!”

Orange City was and is overwhelmingly a conservative, evangelical Christian community, and there were expectations about proper conduct on a Sunday.

Once I decided to mow my lawn one Sunday. Going to the gym to exercise was OK, and I liked mowing the lawn because it reminded me of my farmer days. I ran into my next-door neighbor that week, who gave me a decent amount of grief, and I couldn’t tell if he was half joking or not joking at all. . .

A friend told me she got grief for doing laundry on a Sunday. I wondered how someone would know that, and she said that it was winter and they saw steam coming out of the dryer vent!

Regulating what we can and cannot do on a Sunday is not just the domain of Puritan Christians. So-called “Blue Laws” prohibit certain activities and the sale of certain items on Sunday; about half the states have them. Texas forbids the sale of 42 other categories of merchandise.

As you might expect, liquor is a popular target of such laws. Minnesota prohibited it completely until 2017, and even now it can only be sold between 11 am and 6 pm and car dealerships are not allowed to be open or do business on Sundays anywhere in the state.

¹ *Announced: Welcome to Ordinary Time! If you are keeping track on your Revised Common Lectionary score, you know that we will be reflecting Jesus’ life and ministry, until we start year C with Advent four weeks before Christmas. Ordinary Time is not “boring” time. It comes from “ordinal numbers” rank as opposed to “cardinal numbers” which are quantity or how many. We will spend the first of 8 weeks with Mark until we move to John at the end of July. Ordinary Time is the Season of Nurture and Growth, hence the color for this season is Green, for growth. Our focus during Ordinary Time is on developing a deeper understanding of Christian discipleship.*

So, the important thing to remember is that if we are out of communion wine on a Sunday, we'll have to wait until 11:00 to pick some up...!

So what can and can't we do on a Sunday? . . .

What do you do, or not do on Sunday?

“Sabbath” comes from the first creation account in Genesis 2:4a:

²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he *rested* on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work He had done in creation.

It is unique in the creation account. The word for “rested” as in God rested, is shabbat, or “Sabbath.”

Now, we don't think that God had worked hard and was tired and needed a break. No, God created sacred TIME. God consciously carved out a 24 hours that were consecrated. Set aside. Special. Holy. “Holy” literally means “set apart” or “separate,” “set aside” for God.

Sabbath was, and is for Jewish people, the 7th day, Saturday. The early Christian church decided to move “Sabbath” from the last day of the week to the first day of the week to honor and remember the day Jesus was raised from the dead.

The day makes its way into the 10 commandments, the “10 best ways to live” in the law given to Moses in the wilderness on Mt Siani: Exodus 20

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it **holy**. ⁹For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but **rested** the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and **consecrated** it.

Everyone gets a break. Everyone rests. . .

Interestingly, as you may know, there is a second recitation of the 10 c's that appears in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, literally “2nd law,” is, according to the text, the speech Moses gave on the cusp of entering the promised land after 40

years of wandering. The Exodus version gives the reason for Sabbath observance as the imitation of God's own activity: God created for six days, and then God rested.

But now listen to the reason for observing the Sabbath in our OT text for the day, Deut. 5:

12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 For six days you shall labour and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 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.

Did you catch it? “Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt,
And the Lord your God brought you out of there.”

Slaves set free.

The oppressed, released.

The exploited and abused, emancipated.

The children of Israel,

were *liberated* by their Lord.

So on this second recounting of the Sabbath, we see the addition of the theme of liberation.

One straightforward way to understand it is that
Liberated for what? Just what were the Israelites supposed to do when they weren't making bricks for the pyramids?

Well, here is what God said to Moses:

When I set you free, you will

Say to [Pharaoh] “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say,
‘Let my people go, so that *they may worship me* in the wilderness.’

They were going to be liberated, *so that they could worship*.

Maybe that sounds familiar? We are, in a way, liberated from our usual responsibilities and commitments, so that we can be here, to worship God, in this consecrated space,

Being reminded of our identity in the baptismal font,
Hearing the word from the pulpit,
Uniting with Christ and one another
in the breaking the bread and drinking of the cup.

But we have to ask how this affects the other six days of the week. In other words, is liberation from our usual responsibilities for worship something that only applies to Sundays?

Not according to esteemed and revered OT scholar Walter Brueggemann. You can tell from the title of his 2014 book what he thinks: *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*.

Here is a further description of his book:

“Discussions about the Sabbath often center around moralistic laws and arguments over whether a person should be able to play cards or purchase liquor on Sundays. In this volume, popular author Walter Brueggemann writes that the Sabbath is not simply about keeping rules but rather about becoming a whole person and restoring a whole society. Importantly, Brueggemann speaks to a 24/7 society of consumption, a society in which we live to achieve, accomplish, perform, and possess. We want more, own more, use more, eat more, and drink more. Keeping the Sabbath allows us to break this restless cycle and focus on what is truly important: God, other people, all life. Brueggemann offers a transformative vision of the wholeness God intends, giving world-weary Christians a glimpse of a more fulfilling and simpler life through Sabbath observance.”

Another commentator puts it this way:²

“We keep Sabbath not because it makes us more productive at work. We keep it to *resist the idol of productivity*. we are more than what we produce.” . . . these are revolutionary words in a capitalist and consumerist culture.

We resist and work for liberation, because

²Rich Villodas on Twitter

The gospel text for today shows these themes of resistance against oppression for liberation. In the first story, Jesus “unlawfully” allows his disciples to gather grain to eat.

In the second story, he resists the laws of the Sabbath, liberates the man from his withered hand, and he stretches it out to wholeness.

A friend of mine recently told me this story, which illustrates resistance for liberation:

Her 4-year-old was playing soccer. Apparently, he played a little too rambunctiously and received a yellow card. When the ref, an older man, issued the yellow card, he proceeded, inappropriately, to poke the 4-year-old in the chest with his finger to convince her son of the severity of his infraction.

At this point, she rushed onto the field to protect her son as only a mama bear could. The rules of the league were such that if a parent was ever on the field, the game was over, so that’s what happened.

Resistance to oppression is not easy, and not without consequence. Just ask Jesus. . . ! But resistance to liberate is in the fabric of the creation of God’s world, confirmed by the holiness of the Sabbath,

* * *

But, how might we imitate Jesus this week? How might we resist the Egyptian gods and powers of our day? How might we “Say No to the Culture of Now”? May God continue to guide us, so that we continue to grow in our ability to liberate ourselves and our fellow human beings, for health and wholeness, and ultimately the worship of God.

Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.