

Season after Pentecost - The Ten Commandments (Week 3)

June 9/10, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown, MD

Readings: Matthew 22:34-40; Exodus 20: 8-11

Grace and peace to you from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

I hate to tell you this. I'm really sorry to be the one to bring the news. But if I don't tell you, who will? Here it is. You've been duped. I've been duped. We have been deceived, tricked, cheated and double-crossed. It's as if we have had our own Eden serpent telling us lies and we've gone for it just like Eve and Adam. Yep. I know, it's not nice to hear but it's the truth. We've been hoodwinked and swindled and we don't even realize it. I know. I know. It's a shock. But, hey, don't get mad at me. I'm just the messenger. I've fallen for it as much as anyone.

It's not really just one lie but a whole story of them. And it goes like this. The man or woman who works the most hours is the winner. The one with the busiest schedule, with hardly a moment to spare is the success. The man or woman, employed or retired, who tries to jam as much as possible in each 24 hours is the model achiever that we are to aspire to imitate. That's it. That's the lie most of us have swallowed hook, line and sinker.

Don't believe me? Look at your calendar. Or your adult child's calendar. Look at the calendar of the average family with school-aged children. Still not, convinced? Think back to the mid to late 1900s when we were told that all the technology that was being developed would make it possible to do our jobs and care for our homes in less time. Our work week would shrink to 30 hours. We'd have more time for leisure, family and learning. In the 2014 Gallup Poll, adults employed full time in the U.S. report working an average of 47 hours per week, almost a full workday longer than what a standard five-day, 9-to-5 schedule entails.

In fact, half of all full-time workers indicate they typically work more than 40 hours, and nearly four in 10 say they work at least 50 hours.¹ Many report that they fear losing their job if they don't put in the extra hours without additional pay. Time is money. Then there are the many who can't get by on one job and work two or three. No forty-hour week for them either.

When we are finally "off the clock" or retire from full-time employment, the mantra continues: stay busy, stay busy. Get to the gym; get kids involved in as many activities as possible; keep that yard good enough for Better Homes and Gardens.

We've been duped. We've been conditioned to believe that the one who is the most tired is the most productive, contributing member of society. We make derogatory remarks about the "rat race" yet we seem to keep increasing the pace; packing as much as possible in a day or week; nearly addicted to the constant stream of texts, social media postings, news updates on our phones. We still have the long-lingering lie that the one with the most money and stuff when they die wins. We're stuck in the mire of measuring our worth by how much we do. Which is one reason that when our health or age limits us, we battle depression and question our worth. It's the energizer bunny not the eagle who is really our national symbol.

You may think I'm exaggerating or getting out a good rant. But it's more. We have more, do more, know more and have amazing medical advancement but we are no healthier than our grandparents — many would say much less healthy and much less able to be content.

God knows all of this. God has known from the beginning of our human time. God made us after all. He made us to be stewards of the earth, to find great meaning in contributing, creating, caring for creation alongside our Lord. And, since

God made us and knew we over-achieving humans could go overboard, God modeled Sabbath and commanded us to do the same:

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For 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.”

I know the blue laws are gone. I know there are people who have to work on Sunday or risk losing their job. I know for some that Sunday is the only day they sleep in or get the grocery shopping done. I'm not here to judge those who don't make it to church every week. I'm here to proclaim that the Lord says we need rest. Sleep, most certainly, but also rest for our bodies, minds and souls. Time to just do— not need to prove anything to anyone. Time to just be — for the pure, renewing joy of it. There is meant to be a rhythm in life of work and rest. God knew, God knows that a body and spirit that are not regularly renewed and refueled will not know life in its fullest. Oh, they may know a jam-packed life but not the rich, energized life of peace, generosity, and hope that carry one through all manners of circumstances.

God created the Sabbath for us. “Sabbath” may no longer be Sunday for everyone. For most, it will not be a full day each week. What IS God's command is that we regularly honor the practice of Sabbath — resting in God's grace and glory . . . interrupting ordinary time with sacred time — in order to let God's gifts of joy and refreshment restore our over busy selves. And, by the way, that doesn't mean making Sabbath into another thing to put on your to-do-list. In this time of human history, I think it means finding and continually re-discovering what is restful and restorative to you. If the working in the yard or garden is a chore that needs to get

done — that's not Sabbath. If you love to get your hands in the garden dirt or you find riding the mower listening to your favorite music a kick, then we're talking Sabbath. "Sabbath is not anti-work. It is a way to put work in its proper place"² and to claim God's gift of a "time out of time"³ to be restored.

Honoring the Sabbath has become one of the most difficult commandments of God to obey. I should know — I am terrible at it. I seem to have two speeds — on or off. Sabbath is no longer Sunday for most of us. We gave that away and up long ago. Many of us here fully appreciate and honor *worship* as Sabbath but not the restorative rest portion. Perhaps we are in need of a modern-day Martin Luther to help us re-define "Sabbath" for the twenty-first century. If it is not a particular 24-hour period, what is it?

First, Sabbath is a gift from God for the love of us. Do we accept God's gift or return it unopened? Second, Sabbath is a spiritual discipline we adopt not just in obedience but also in trust that God who made us and loves us knows what is best. Thirdly, I'd say that the third commandment gives us serious permission to look over our calendars, activities and work to make it more humane. In our day, honoring the Sabbath is permission to "downsize" our lifestyles and restore a life-giving balance of work and rest. Finally, honoring the Sabbath is God's directing us to consciously, intentionally find our way to regularly have Sabbath time — an interruption of busyness to enjoy God's gift of life. If you are fortunate enough to still have control of your Sunday, how can you make it a day apart for renewal? For those of us for whom a 24-hour Sabbath seems impossible, the third commandment challenges us to find ways to be more deliberate about claiming our Sabbath moments and practices — time out of time in which we can revel and rest in the beauty, wonder and love of God. It can happen during a walk, a cup of coffee

on the patio, a picnic lunch at a park, whatever brings you to a slower pace in which you notice God's gifts and draw replenishment for your spirit.

I started this morning telling you bad news. Let me conclude with the good news. We can stop disregarding the Sabbath and, instead, expand our understanding of Sabbath — as a gift and a command from God for our well-being. The third commandment frees us to acknowledge that the ones with the busiest schedule, the ones most frazzled, the ones who turn vacations and holidays into work, the ones who have no time are *not* the champions we are to aspire to be. The Lord promises that when we wisely and humbly open our lives to the wisdom and love revealed at Mt. Sinai long ago, we are able to reclaim the healthy, life-giving rhythm of work, rest and Sabbath. Hear the good news ---- The Sabbath we are commanded to honor ministers to our spirit and soul. It gifts us with a holy and wholesome perspective on our work and our rest and all our time is made richer in God's healing and creative hands. It is the rare person who can enjoy the Sabbath of our youth or our grandparents. Now is the time to courageously redefine and honor Sabbath so we can be the healthier, renewing, curious, peace-filled people God created us to be. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 6/8/18

ENDNOTES

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1. Lydia Saad, "The "40-Hour" Workweek Is Actually Longer -- by Seven Hours" as posted at <http://news.gallup.com/poll/175286/hour-workweek-actually-longer-seven-hours.aspx>

2. Donna Schaper, Sabbath Sense: A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked Philadelphia PA: Innisfree Press, 1997 p.25

3. Ibid, p. 30