

Sermon: *Where is Your Sacred Space (The Sabbath Was Made for Us)*  
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angles by the Sea, 6.2.24

The Sunday Bible readings for the summer will have a theme. As we go deeper into the summer months, I'll ask you if you picked up on the theme of the lessons. In fact, I'll ask you that question today – did you pick up on the theme for this Sunday? The theme I am hearing this week is about the Sabbath and its observance. Admittedly, this is a foreign concept for many of us. It's a Jewish observance that Christianity has been adopted into. Do you remember when movie theaters were closed on Sunday? Although that is largely not the case today, it is a part of our recent history. The actual Sabbath starts sundown Friday night and runs for basically 25 hours – sundown on Saturday (the extra hour is to make sure the sun is really down). Because Christ made his first, and subsequent, resurrection appearances on Sunday (technically, after sundown on Saturday), Christianity observed the Sabbath as Sunday – which is why many places were closed on Sunday.

The Gospel lesson today, from the second chapter of Mark's Gospel, shows Jesus and his disciples under suspicion from the religious authorities for doing "work" on the Sabbath. The disciples were hungry, so they plucked grain and ate it on a Saturday. That bothered the authorities who were following them. They challenged Jesus on this and, as usual, he asked them questions in return, like, "Have you read where King David ate the bread in the Temple on the Sabbath?" (Of course they read that, by the way, but chose to ignore it when admonishing Jesus' disciples) They were on the way to the synagogue, as was their practice, on Saturday. When they arrived, a man with a withered hand was there. The religious authorities wondered if Jesus was going to heal the man on a Sabbath. (The point to this is that healing someone would constitute as work and therefore is prohibited on the Sabbath) Sensing the tension in the air, Jesus looked around and asked, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?" The answer is yes – one is able to save one's sheep that falls into a pit on the sabbath; yet, they were silent. Mark gives us a rare glimpse into what Jesus was feeling – he was angry and was grieved over their silence which came from their "hardness of heart." As a side note, this shows the heart of Jesus, that when he is angry he turns to grief. Jesus asked the man to stretch out his hand and he was healed instantly. This made the religious authorities to get angry and they decided at that moment to "find a way to destroy Jesus." To "destroy" him. Not box him in, or shut him down, or belittle him, or to undermine him, or ignore him. No, they set out to destroy him. Their anger did not turn to grief, it turned to destruction. This means the Sabbath must have been a hot button issue in the first century... to say the least.

Jesus declared that the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath. The best way I can describe what that means is a conversation I had once with the bishop of San Diego. He said, "The canons of the Church serve us; we don't serve the canons. When something needs to be changed, because it no longer serves us, we change them. They are there to serve us." The Sabbath was made to serve humankind. It was not designed for us to use it as something to harm each other with. Or destroy one another. The Sabbath was designed for us because we need a break. We need a space and a time to pause, to reflect, to worship, to just breathe. It was made to serve us.

If you take a look at page 350 in the Book of Common Prayer, you'll see the ten commandments. If you read through them with me, you'll see that the first one is to have no other gods but God. Number two is to not make any idols. Number three is to use God's name correctly and wisely (or not to misuse it). Number four, observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Number five through ten – honor your father and mother, do not kill, steal, lie, cheat or covet. One way to look at the commandments is as a hierarchy. Number one is most important. Number two is second most important and onward. Yes, this means honoring your parents is more important than not murdering. I'm not going to get into that today, but I want you to see where the Sabbath falls – number four. The top three is how to relate to God. Five through ten is how to relate to your family, your neighbors, and strangers. What is number four? It can be seen as a way to relate to yourself. The Sabbath was made for us. How are you to treat God – take no other gods, don't make idols, use God's name correctly. How are you to treat yourself, take a sabbath. Take a break. Once a week, whether you need it or not. It was made for us.

Let me ask you a question: where is your sacred space? Where is your sabbath place? Where do you take time to rest, relax, to worship God, to pray, to relate to God and yourself? Where is your sacred space?

For me, one sacred space is the chair that has been set aside for me to sit on during worship. On Sunday, I only sit on the chair for the two readings and the psalm. But that's Sunday. During the week, I'll sit here when the church is quiet and no one else is around. It's my sacred space to be with God. I usually sit here and just listen. I breathe intentionally – which means I am aware of my breathing and do so intentionally. It is a place that centers me.

I have another sacred place. It is behind the steering wheel of my Toyota Camry. I sit there and pray, a lot. I talk to God, a lot. I sing; sometimes I sit in silence. I sometimes call some of you. But, it's my space to be alone with God. Usually on Sunday afternoon, I'll drive home in silence. I'll just let the day wash over me and give thanks to God.

Where is your sacred space?

This past Friday, Christi and I, just the two of us, went out on our boat. It was after dinner. We wanted to fish. Mainly we just wanted to spend time together. We were sitting in about six inches of water on our favorite sandbar watching the sun set. That is my sacred space. Just she and me, in salt water, in nature, watching the sun set. It's sacred. (I sighed and said to Christi, "The boat: a great source of peace, and stress." But, that's a whole separate sermon. I had a friend refer to her children as the same way – my greatest source of peace and strength and my greatest source of stress.)

Where is your sacred space? Is it also watching the sunset? Spending time with the one you love? Where is your sacred space?

I have another question for you: when do you visit your sacred space?

The Fourth Commandment has us visit our sacred space each week. I have a clergy friend who takes her Sabbath on Monday – she does not make phone calls, answer emails, or do anything

electronic on that day; she will not go to diocesan clergy events on that day either. Like many things that are good for us, it takes incremental steps to move us in the right direction. For me, I try not to read email on Saturday. I try not to do anything computer related either. Maybe one day I can get to where my friend is on her weekly sacred space and time.

When is your sacred time?

We have a tai chi instructor at All Angels. Taking time for your sacred space is a little like tai chi – you can't master it after one visit. Or your second, or third visit. Tai chi, like life, is a work in progress. I have had people that have tried to take on meditating as their sacred time. They quite literally try it for ten minutes and then give up because "It's not working." In my experience, meditation cannot be mastered in ten minutes. Or ten weeks. Maybe not even in ten years. It's a practice that one sticks with through discipline and desire to make it work. The same can be said about sacred time. I didn't just sit once in the Rector's chair in the church and suddenly I felt close to God. No, it's something I have to work towards.

Here's something else interesting about sacred time: if you stop your practice, you won't feel much difference... until you need the peace/strength/joy/centering that you received from it. Back to tai chi, after doing it for a while, you can miss a class or two; miss your sacred time occasionally; and be fine. But, if you are away for an extended time, it's almost like you have to start over. People who attend church – and call church their sacred space and time – and then go on an extended vacation, or illness, or travel, or whatever life throws at them, they'll tell me that they don't miss church so they stop going. That is until they need what they receive from their sabbath time, and then it's gone. Thankfully; unlike weightlifting, or yoga, or tai chi, once you stop it's like starting over again; you can start up at church was your sacred space and not have to do much catch up. I think that is one of the beautiful things about sabbath time is that if you miss out on it for a while, there is not a lot of metaphorical sore muscles once you resume your practice and participation. I think it's because the sabbath was made for us (and not us for the sabbath).

There is one more aspect to the sabbath that I want to talk about – Jewish mysticism. I have read that it was believed in Jesus' day, and most likely in our day too, that when you are in your sacred space, your angel is there with you. When you rest, your angel, or angels, rest too. You know the phrase: do not drive faster than your angel can fly. When you are out doing your work for the six days of the week, your angels are out working with you, around you and for you. In other words, they are hard at work trying to keep up with you (and your family and your friends and all whom you love). But, when you keep your sacred time, when you stop and relax, so do your angels. If you have had children in your life, it's like when they are young, and they finally fall asleep after a busy day, you can sit down and relax too. That's how your guardian angels feel when you take your sabbath time. They too can relax. In mysticism, when you take your sabbath, you may feel closer to the divine, or the Holy, or to your angel. That's because they are there with you on their sacred time. For those who have sensitivity to divine beings, they like to be in church with others because all the angels are here too.

In your sacred sabbath time, we are taking a moment from the rush of the busy world to pause. In our pause, we reflect and rejoice and give thanks to God. In Jewish circles, it is said that you

have six days to change the world and one day to let the world be what it is. On our sabbath time, we simply take the world as it is presented to us. We reflect that God is in charge and that we are given the charge to make changes six days but on one day, to let God make the changes in us that will help us to change the world. It is believed that the famous Beatles song, Let it Be, was based on John Lennon's meditation practice which was for a little while each day to simply receive the world as it is – not as he wants it to be, nor as it should be, or could be, but simply to let the world be. To let it be. That's the final part about sacred space and time – to be in your place, whenever it is you visit it, and to let the world, let your nation, your community, your family, and yourself, be as it is presented. To receive yourself, your faith, your family and friends and your community as it is – to not change it, or think of better ways of living, no, to just receive it as it is.

The sabbath was made for you. It was made for us to relate to ourselves. To take a rest from worries and fear. To take a sabbath from anxiety; to rest from anger, disappointment and resentment; to take a sabbath rest from coveting what others have; to take a break from expectations of yourself or bitterness about others; to take a sacred time to breathe in peace and exhale confusion. To spend time in your sacred space to remember that the world does not possess you but rather you are God's possession. To remember that the sabbath was made for us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.