

# **Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

## **A SABBATH REST**

### ***Prayer***

Abba, help us to understand that our Sabbath rest is in Christ alone.

AMEN

### ***Introduction***

Let's begin by reminding ourselves that the book of Hebrews, by an unknown author, reinforces the continuity of the community of faith between the chosen people of God in the Old Testament, the Jews, and those in the New Testament, the Christians. How God's revelation of Himself became clearer and clearer until that revelation was embodied in our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

The idea of a Sabbath rest predates the Ten Commandments, going back to the creation, where in Genesis (2:2-3) we read:

*And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

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### ***Sabbath Rest – According to the Law***

As early as 700 BC, the teachers of the Law, the Rabbis, had codified what is meant to NOT keep the Sabbath. There are found in the Mishna, the first written collection of the Jewish oral traditions, of rabbinic literature, also known as the Oral Torah. There are 39 broad categories of prohibited work:

- Pertaining to Bread (11) such as sowing, plowing or reaping
- Pertaining to Garments (13) such as dyeing, spinning, or weaving
- Pertaining to Hides (7) such as trapping, slaughtering, or skinning
- Pertaining to Construction (8) such as building, writing, or ignition

And, over time and in good legalistic fashion, these 39 were further refined and defined, such that while lighting a candle was prohibited work, closing a window to prevent one from going out was not.

In addition to these negatives, there were positives – The entire day's activities was to be focused on family gatherings, prayer, study, and song. The keeping of these rules, both avoiding the prohibited work and engaging in the prescribed activities, is one of the benchmarks by which

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even contemporary Jews measure their orthodoxy – their conformance to historical norms.

What's wrong with this you may ask? Adherence to a list of **DOs and DON'Ts** isn't what God requires. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we like the Jews before us have inherited their fallen nature and **cannot** keep the Law.

While the specific list reflects activities of that agricultural and nomadic middle eastern lifestyle, the modern list isn't too different.

In looking for artwork for the bulletin cover, I compiled a similar list of **DOs and DON'Ts** from what you might hear in Christian sermons, based on today text, from across the U.S. today:

- Don't work, such as the closure of retail stores like Chik-fil-a, or the prohibition on liquor sales
- Don't engage in sports, such as when Eric Liddell famously skipped his Olympic race 100 years ago.
- Do spend time with God and others that we are in relationship with
- Do attend church and focus on God

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- Do allow God to restore, replenish, and refocus your heart and mind
- Do your best to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word
- Do the hard work of resting and relaxing

The last one is somewhat innovative, as prior to the advent of the industrial and information ages, there just wasn't that much leisure time for most people. But in general, today's list is not unlike that from over 2,500 years ago, because we want to DO something to DEMONSTRATE our worthiness to God, to earn His favor, to MERIT eternal life.

Indeed, even the exhortation included on today's cover (Heb 4:11)

*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest*

is a word of law that we cannot keep.

### ***Sabbath Rest – According to the Promise***

So then how should we understand the Sabbath Rest? Let's start by looking at some of the other ways in which God interacted with His chosen people in the Old Testament that were a foreshadowing of the person and work of Jesus.

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**The Sacrificial System:** No longer do we need to bring animals and grains to a specific location to be sacrificed or burnt to atone for our sins, as Christ's willing sacrifice and His death on the cross was the reality of that foreshadowing. This one-time act was sufficient to allow me to confidently proclaim to you each week that your sins are forgiven.

This was confirmed by Hosea when he wrote (Hos 6:6):

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

**A Class of Priests:** The priests were the intermediaries between God and man, offering the above sacrifices on a regular basis. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn, and God was no longer hidden from his people. Christ is our high priest, our advocate with the God the Father. As it says in the extended version of today's reading – verse 16:

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

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**Prophets:** From Job to John the Baptist, God called particular people to be His mouthpiece, to speak words of judgement or word of promise to the people of that time and often to overlay those immediate applications with a foreshadowing of Jesus, both God and man, who delivered the Father's message in both word and deed. Jesus fulfills the role of prophet in that He alone is the ultimate teacher, who has the words of eternal life, as recorded by St. John (6:68)

*Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,*

So, Christ is our one all-encompassing sacrifice, our High Priest, and our ultimate Prophet. Do you think that Christ could also be our Sabbath Rest?

Indeed, as recorded by Mark (2:27-28), Jesus explains the real reason for the Sabbath after the Pharisees rebuked His disciples for doing prohibited work on the Sabbath.

*And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."*

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God rested from His work of creation and declared the seventh day to be a Sabbath – a day that is Holy, set apart. We can rest in Christ, since His work of redemption has been completed and He has made us a Holy People, a royal priesthood. We rest IN CHRIST, not because of anything we have done, but because God the Father chose us to be members of His Son's body. Through Word and Sacrament, He gives us the Faith to believe that He cares for us, that our sins have been forgiven, and that He will keep us in that Faith unto life eternal.

AMEN

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*For those of you interested in the details:*

### **39 Melakhot (Categories of Work)**

sowing, plowing, reaping, binding (of sheaves), threshing, winnowing, separating fit from unfit crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning it, weaving it, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, trapping a deer, slaughtering it, flaying its skin, salting its flesh, curing its hide, scraping its hide, cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing two letters in order to write two letters, building, tearing down, extinguishing a flame, kindling a flame, beating with a hammer, and moving from one domain to another.