



Pentecost 2

June 3, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

**Theme: WHILE ABUSES OF THE SABBATH ARE COMMON,
JESUS SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT,
DIRECTING OUR ATTENTION TO THE GOSPEL.**

Sermon Text: Mark 2:23-28 (NIV)

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain-fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

²⁵ He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

²⁷ Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

My dear fellow redeemed, bought and paid for by the precious blood of Jesus!

“**Fake news**” has become a hot topic in the media ever since Donald J. Trump emerged on the scene as a legitimate contender for the office he now holds: President of the United States. Political parties and newsrooms have been accused of applying their own spin to

news stories in an effort to destroy the reputations and credibility of individuals running for or holding public office. This week's biggest **"fake news"** story was about the anti-Putin Russian journalist, **Arkady Babchenko**, who was supposedly killed in cold blood outside his apartment in Kiev, Ukraine only to appear hours later alive and well at a news conference held at the headquarters of Ukraine's State Security Service. Talk about **"fake news"**!

In today's Gospel lesson, the Pharisees—the most powerful and influential political party in Jesus' day—were endeavoring to do much the same thing, spinning an activity that was taking place in a grainfield in order to suit their ongoing efforts to destroy Jesus' reputation and credibility. The issue was the Sabbath, and

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On this particular Sabbath, an opportunity for **"fake news"** was developing before the Pharisees' eyes, and they sought to capitalize on it and spin it in such a way as to discredit Jesus, and, if possible, even punish Him for His public offense. Mark sets the scene: Jesus and His disciples are passing **"through the grainfields."** The disciples are hungry, and so **"they began to pick some heads of grain"**—an action that was entirely permissible according to **Deuteronomy 23:25**, which reads: **"If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain."**

Beyond the requirements of the Law of Moses, uber-orthodox rabbis had created additional rules for the Sabbath, including one that explicitly forbade reaping of any kind. Under this man-made stipulation, the disciples' action of snapping off heads of grain and rubbing them in their hands to glean the grain was verboten. If the Sabbath reaping was done in ignorance, the punishment was to offer a sacrifice. But if it was done on purpose, the offender was to be stoned to death—a pretty harsh punishment for picking a handful of grain, don't you think?

The Pharisees saw this as a golden opportunity to find serious fault with Jesus and His disciples. Applying their strict interpretation of their rule to the disciples' activity, the Pharisees thought they could find fault with Jesus for allowing His followers to so blatantly disregard the Sabbath. So they **"said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'"** As often happens with **"fake news,"** the Pharisees' effort gave Jesus the chance to move the conversation from **"fake news"** to the Good News. Jesus and His friends were doing more than just **"passing thru"** a field of standing grain. Mark stresses the point to make a bigger one: Jesus was intent on fulfilling His ultimate purpose for His time on earth.

On this Sabbath Day—and every day of His earthly life—Jesus was making His way to Calvary's cross to offer His sinless life up as the all-atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, from Adam and Eve to the last sinful human being born on earth before His triumphant return on Judgment Day. In a certain sense, their journey thru the **"grainfields"** that day foreshadowed the events of Palm Sunday, when they'd follow their Savior-King into Jerusalem so He could complete His mission.

Jesus used this as an opportunity to overwhelm the Pharisees' **"fake news"** with the truth. First, there was the truth about the Sabbath Day. Jesus told them, **"The Sabbath was**

made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” God originally intended the Sabbath to be set aside as the one day each week for physical rest and spiritual rejuvenation. And then there was the truth associated with David—a “hero of faith” whom the Pharisees esteemed most highly. Jesus made the point that even David assumed authority over the Law of Moses to feed his hungry soldiers. And now, great David’s greater son had arrived not only to assume authority over the Law but also to fulfill it perfectly in our place and to atone for its penalties as our Substitute. **“So,”** Jesus states, **“the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”** These gospel truths trumped any legal charge the Pharisees might’ve leveled against Jesus in their misguided efforts to destroy His reputation and credibility.

As we consider this text today, it’s important to recognize that the **“fake news”** about the Sabbath didn’t end when Jesus set the Pharisees straight. There are still “Pharisees” today who pride themselves in having a “perfect attendance” record at worship for umpteen years who look down their noses at fellow believers whose worship record isn’t quite as stellar and use that as the litmus test to judge the faith and life of such Christians as having been weighed in the balance and found wanting. They may even be overheard saying such things to fellow “Pharisees.” Even more common, are those who spin the Sabbath to suit themselves: **“I don’t really need to go to church and hear the same things over and over again,”** or, **“I can find physical relaxation and worship God on the golf course, soccer pitch or in the great outdoors just as well as a pew-sitter in a church building—probably even better!”**

Such attitudes toward God’s Third Commandment—**“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy”**—can only result in carelessness regarding all of God’s commandments to put Him first and foremost, their Sabbath-Day sins costing them the opportunity to receive the encouragement of fellow Christians and the dose of God’s Spirit-laden gospel to strengthen their faith and life. For this reason—and, prompted by our text for today—it’s important to review once more what the Old Testament Sabbath still means for us today.

First, the truth is that **“the Sabbath was created for man”** and not the other way around. God provided it to satisfy the vital needs of every human being: a day of physical rest and spiritual restoration; a day to refill the fuel tank, so to speak; a weekly respite from life’s cares and crises; a time of renewal, strength and hope.

Second, the truth is that when we do keep the Sabbath by assembling together for corporate worship like we’re doing right now, we give each other a **“faith-lift”** by our mutual encouragement. We’re reminded that we do not walk alone. We walk with God and with our fellow believers through this sin-filled world.

We’re family—God’s family. We also have the opportunity to hear no less than God’s life-giving Word with its steady drumbeat of Jesus’ unwavering efforts to keep God’s Law perfectly in our place as He trekked to the cross to atone for our sins. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews urges us: **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day (of Judgment) approaching”** (10:25).

Friends, there are no more uplifting and encouraging words than the words of absolution I spoke over you after you privately confessed your personal sins and followed that up with your corporate confession: **“as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** And there’s no more intimate, reassuring moment than the one that will occur later on in this service when you receive Christ’s true body and blood, given and shed for **your** pardon and **your** peace.

How sad—not to mention, serious—it is when we fail to make use of opportunities to come together to celebrate as one what God has done for us and to receive the assurance that, in Jesus, our sins have been forgiven! A church-college fundraiser once approached a wealthy church-goer to ask him for a sizeable contribution for the school's endowment fund. The man responded, ***“No thanks. I don't like strawberries.”*** Surprised by his response, the fundraiser asked what strawberries had to do with his request for a contribution. So the man explained: ***“When you don't want to do something, any excuse will do.”*** And that's the nature of every excuse not to ***“remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.”***

Thank God for ***“the Son of Man,”*** who on the day in our text made His way through the ***“grainfields”*** on His mission to save us from false pride or lame excuses regarding the Sabbath—along with all of our other sins to boot. Because of Jesus, your sins ***are*** forgiven! Because of Jesus, go in peace! Amen.