



Christ Lutheran Church

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Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“What is the Lord’s Day for?” – Mark 2:23-28

2nd Sunday after Pentecost – June 3, 2018

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Mark’s second chapter.

My dear family in Christ, a few weeks ago I brought the idea of “fake news” into the sermon, and that with a parallel to the most recent national political campaigns. Today, I’m starting us off with the concept of “spin” – an application to said news stories, arising in the late 1980s, to try either to destroy the opponent’s credibility or cast their own candidate’s information in the best possible light; “spinning” the news in one direction or the other.

In today’s Gospel the pharisees, a powerful and influential political/religious party in Jesus’ day, were striving to do the same thing – spinning activity that was taking place to suit their ongoing efforts to destroy Jesus’ reputation and credibility. At issue was the keeping of the Sabbath and abuses of the same.

On this Sabbath or LORD’S day, an opportunity for such news and spin was taking place before the pharisees’ eyes – an opportunity to discredit this rabbi from Nazareth and, possibly, to punish Him and His followers.

Jesus' and His disciples were making their way through a grain field. The hungry disciples were plucking some of the grains to eat them. This, in itself, was permissible (Deut. 23:25). However, additional rules had been added to the Law of Moses by the pharisees, to "help" people in keeping the Sabbath; the thought being that if you can put a couple of fences between you and the ten commandments, you won't get near breaking the ten commandments. It's a laudable goal, but completely unbiblical.

The additional rule was against "reaping". What the disciples were doing could be construed as "reaping." The punishment for this reaping was the requirement to offer a sacrifice if the reaping was done in ignorance or being stoned to death if the reaping was done purposefully.

Here was an opportunity to find serious fault with Jesus through His disciples. It wasn't breaking the third commandment, but it was going against what the pharisees had dreamed up to keep you from breaking the third commandment. But again, Jesus moves the conversation from fake news to the Good News.

As St. Mark includes this account in the Gospel his use of the phrase "**made their way**" to describe what Jesus and His disciples were doing calls attention to Christ Jesus' overall purpose during His time on earth. On this day, as on every day of His life, Jesus was **making His way** to His sacrificial death on the cross. Perhaps we can even imagine the waving grain a foreshadowing of the crowds with their waving palm branches, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Jesus confronts the spin head on. The truth was that the Sabbath had been made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It was a day set aside each week for physical rest and spiritual care.

As you know the calendar we follow was set up on the words of God – working six days and resting on the seventh. With the resurrection, the rest day became the first day of the week as we celebrate Christ Jesus' victory over death – which He shares with us by faith. Back in 1793, with

the execution of the Marie Antionette, the French sought to highlight reason and de-Christianize life. Part of this would involve the Gregorian Calendar which we follow.

In abolishing the calendar they replaced it with one of 12 months, 30 days each, broken into 10 day decades with the final day being the day of rest. 5 extra days were added to the end of the year (6 in leap years) and they were dedicated to acknowledged principles of the enlightenment. It would be in 1806 that this attempt was abolished as an absolute failure – our bodies don't work well with a ten day week. The Sabbath was made for man in God's wise design.

How one observes the remainder of this day, following worship, is just fine in a great variety. If you can do something you enjoy and you can praise God for the opportunity and ability to do it, that will refresh you and maintain your attitude of gratitude to God. For example, many of you could tend your gardens today in good Sabbath worship – enjoying working the soil and thanking God for it. I could not – I don't enjoy gardening. But I could mow the yard – which some of you might not find relaxing and enjoyable as an opportunity that God has given you.

Secondly, King David had assumed authority over the law to feed his soldiers. This King David did with the showbread of the Temple. Now the greater David, the long-awaited Son of Man promised by God, had come not only to assume authority over the Law but also to atone for its consequences for humankind. Jesus would be the Lord of the Sabbath by removing our sins in Good Friday's death and defeating death and everlasting condemnation in that Easter Sunday morning's resurrection.

Such faulty spins on the keeping of the Sabbath haven't ended with Jesus setting the Pharisees straight. To have a streak wherein a person hasn't missed a Sunday's worship in years is a wonderful blessing. But to use that as a measuring stick by which another's faith and life as a Christian isn't up to par is certainly on the verge of pharisaic.

Even more common are those who spin the Sabbath in the other direction, to suit themselves. **“I don’t really need to go to church to hear the same thing over and over again,”** or **“I can find physical relaxation and worship God on the links, at the ballfields or in the great outdoors just as well as sitting in a pew in a building.”**

Such attitudes toward God’s Third Commandment (in the top ten mind you!) **“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy”** are a manifestation of carelessness regarding all of God’s commandments. It shows that God is not in the primary place (first commandment) and it costs them the opportunity of receiving the encouragement of fellow Christians and the power of God’s Spirit to strengthen their faith and life in the news of their forgiveness won in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

What is the Sabbath for, today? First of all, it is still a day created for your good and mine. It is provided by God to satisfy important needs: a day for physical rest and spiritual restoration.

Secondly, when we keep the Lord’s Day together we receive the mutual encouragement, hearing God’s Word. That Word reminds us of the work of Jesus as He made His way to the cross.

Thirdly, there is no green, no backstop, no set of bleachers nor a mountain meadow that is going to assure you that Christ Jesus died and rose again so that your sins could be forgiven.

This Sabbath is a gift of God. Many in orthodox Judaism refer to the Sabbath, the LORD’S day as “Queen Sabbath.” It is a giver of the gift of the Gospel, serving our God’s purposes by holding us accountable to God’s Law, assuring us of our forgiveness for the sake of Jesus’ death and resurrection and leading us into the new week with a rested body and mind.