

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Transfiguration Sunday, January 21, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 11, 15, 16, 41, 644

Lessons: 1 Samuel 21:1-6, Galatians 4:4-11, Mark 2:23-28.

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus has fulfilled all of God's laws, including the "ceremonial laws" of the Old Testament. Today you just heard about Jesus getting in trouble with the Pharisees because they accused him of breaking one of those ceremonial laws about the Sabbath day. But we are reminded from the Word of God today that Jesus, true Son of God and true Son of Man is

LORD OF THE SABBATH

- 1. The disciples of Jesus are accused of breaking the Sabbath.**
- 2. We hear Jesus' response with examples from Scripture.**
- 3. The Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around.**

"At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath." Just before this is recorded, Jesus had been denouncing the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed because they did not repent. Then he praised his heavenly Father, and the last words he said were *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

In that quotation we see the real purpose of the real Sabbath. The Old Testament Sabbath day should have pointed all who observed it to the real Sabbath, the Savior who gives eternal rest, rest for our souls. The Saturday rest was meant to remind the believing Israelite of God's gracious and wondrous creation of the world and everything in it and point to Jesus, who gives eternal rest.

The Sabbath was instituted for man, to serve him with a day of physical rest and to promote his true welfare, his spiritual welfare. But immediately after hearing these words of invitation in Matthew, we see a contrast between the Gospel message of Jesus and the legalistic message of the Pharisees.

The Law of Moses allowed people using footpaths through cropland to help themselves to whatever was growing, but not to gather more than enough to satisfy their hunger. We read in Deuteronomy: *"If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain."* Deuteronomy 23:24-25 (NIV)

Today you heard that Jesus' *"disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them."* The disciples picked grain from the stalks and rubbed it between their hands to remove the husks.

But *"When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.'"* The Pharisees condemned this act because they considered it labor, work, on the Sabbath. They considered it to be breaking the law. The Jews had developed human rules – great lists of activities – that they claimed were forbidden by God. These rules have been gathered in the three great Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament. One of them, the Mishnah, contained 4,187 rules written down by the rabbis. Over the years, the priests the teachers of the law and the rabbis had worked out a very elaborate set of rules to tell the people

what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, what activities were within the law and which were forbidden. They had listed a number of insignificant activities that were prohibited on the Sabbath. These went so far as to forbid tying or untying a knot and even writing two letters of the alphabet. In their eyes, with their human rules, the action of Jesus' disciples was the same as reaping and winnowing grain.

Three times Jesus reproaches the Pharisees who have such a harsh view of the revelation which God had given them in the Old Testament. He asks them: (1) Have you not read what David did? (2) Or have you not read in the law? And he bluntly tells them: (3) if you had known what this means, ***"I desire mercy, not sacrifice"*** you would understand what we did.

They had not read the law with open eyes and a ready heart. They found what they wanted to in the Old Testament and nothing more. They sought there the confirmation of their own piety. They had a selective eye for the Law of God, or they might have seen there that God is greater than his Sabbath ordinances.

They have exchanged the God of the Old Testament for idolatrous rules from the heart of man. We think of Paul's words to Timothy applying to our day: ***"the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."*** 2 Timothy 4:3 (NIV)

Jesus doesn't even remind them that the disciples had not broken a God-given law, but only a man-made regulation.

Listen to Jesus' three answers for them. First he tells them: ***"Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests."*** Jesus points out that such ceremonial laws must give place to human need. In an emergency the law was broken to satisfy human hunger. David and his men had eaten the showbread, which was reserved for the use of priests alone. You heard in our Old Testament lesson that ***"the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away."*** 1 Samuel 21:6 (NIV)

God had commanded that each Sabbath day 12 fresh loaves of consecrated bread, one representing each of the tribes of Israel, were to be set out in the holy place of the tabernacle. They were offered to God, and the old loaves were eaten by the priests, but only by the priests. But five loaves were given to David and to his men. The Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around.

It was the duty of the high priest to preserve the lives of David and his men, even if his efforts should involve the violation of the ceremonial law. Jesus and his disciples are exercising the duties of their calling. But their call was more exalted than that of David. Every ceremonial law must be subordinated to the law of love.

Secondly, he tells them ***"Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?"*** The priests had to work on the Sabbath. It was forbidden to butcher sheep on Sabbath, yet God had commanded: ***"On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering."*** Numbers 28:9-10 (NIV) No one would accuse the priests at the temple of sinning by offering those sacrifices on the Sabbath, which involved their working. The temple was a symbol and it was the place of God's presence among his people, and the temple was not desecrated by such labor of the priests on the Sabbath.

Jesus was more than a symbol of God's presence. He was Immanuel, God with us, true God incarnate and Lord of the Sabbath. He could set aside Sabbath laws.

The Pharisees themselves had violated the Sabbath by adding hundreds of human rules and regulations which were not spelled out in Scripture at all. Outwardly, it seemed like they had a point. But they completely misunderstood and misinterpreted the law of God. They had made it a way of deserving, of earning heaven. This was pure legalism!

The third point Jesus makes is that he had an even greater authority than looking at the written laws of Moses for what the disciples had done. Jesus proclaims his greatness. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath and its regulations were meant to point Israel forward to the coming Redeemer, and he was now

here to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. In fact, Scripture assures us that Jesus came to give man true rest, rest for the soul eternally in heaven by believing in him as the Savior from all sins!

A true relationship with God is not merely obeying special rules and regulations, but acceptance of and belief in the Son of Man, the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who has fulfilled all things for us.

He told them, as Mark records, ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*** Mark 2:23-28 (NIV)

Jesus had previously claimed that he was “greater than the temple” and here and now is telling us that he is also ***“Lord of the Sabbath”***. But these words led to greater problems for Jesus. These claims were sufficient, in the opinion of the Pharisees to condemn him for blasphemy. We know and believe that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God’s plans for our eternal salvation, for the eternal salvation of mankind.

The Pharisees did not understand the divine principle recorded in Hosea. ***“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”*** Hosea 6:6 (NIV)

The Pharisees sacrifice mercy to human rules which they added to God’s Sabbath. The law of love might at times violate ceremonial laws without being guilty of sin.

The evangelists do not record any answer of the Pharisees to Jesus on this day. They refused to learn from Jesus. They kept looking for more opportunities to discredit him. And, of course, they had another chance on the following Sabbath day, when Jesus healed a man with shriveled hand.

The Pharisees didn’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath. Mark's account of this event reports that ***“Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”*** Mark 3:6 (NIV)

This was a strange alliance, since the Pharisees and the Herodians were natural enemies. The Herodians, a political party, were favorable toward Greek customs and Roman law. But the Pharisees, a religious group, hated everything about foreign culture and wanted to reestablish a purely Jewish way of life. The Pharisees and the Herodians also joined forces in an attempt to trap Jesus on the issue of paying taxes to the Roman government. Although these two groups had no love for each other, they were willing to work together to get rid of Jesus, whom they both considered a dangerous enemy. During the Lenten season each year we review how they tried to get rid of him.

But his disciples believed. We believe. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, as well as the Master and Lord of every day of the week. His perfect obedience to God redeemed us and all mankind. There are no rules we can follow that will cause us to earn our way into heaven. We must beware of falling into the thinking of the Pharisees and rely totally on Jesus for our eternal salvation.

May Jesus be our Lord every day! Amen.