

Ask a kid what he or she wants to be when they grow up, and you might hear all kinds of answers, “I want to be a doctor, firefighter, the quarterback for the Packers.” Have you ever heard a kid say, “I want to be a Christian, and on the side, I’d like to deliver the mail or build houses. The culture of the American Dream is a culture where people like to think of what they do for a living as the thing that defines who they are. I’m a pastor, she’s a teacher or a nurse, he’s a salesman, or a carpenter. Our work becomes like our identity. We work to find our worth. We measure ourselves by how much we accomplish, the prestige that comes with it, and then compare it to the success of others. And because we look to the fruits of our labor for affirmation and validation, we become compliment junkies, workaholics who just need to be doing something, addicts who get their next fix from finishing something.

And then when our efforts don’t deliver success, when the validation we seek doesn’t come, or worse, we face criticism or we lose our jobs, our fragile little egos break. Our identity crumbles because we’ve built on sand and we’re left with a full-fledged identity crisis. If only there were more hours in the day and more days in the week to chase after it all, then we could work it all out, patch up the broken foundation and put back together the pieces of our shattered identity. Just Need More Time!

Did you know the wisest man who ever lived (except for Jesus, of course) tried an experiment with this very same method. He wrote down some notes for us in his journal. **“I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born to my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces...I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun... So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after wind.**

So at the end of this experiment, King Solomon asks some soul-searching questions to get to the heart of his failed experiment, **“What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days, their work is grief and pain, even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? (Ecclesiastes 2:4-9,11,17, 22, 23)**

Did you see what king Solomon put his finger on right there at the end. It’s good to find satisfaction in your work, but it is impossible to find that enjoyment without God. Try all you want. You cannot successfully replace God. Work as long as you can stay awake, make all the money you can fit in your coffers, feed your never ending appetite with “likes” and compliments and it will only leave you starving for more. That’s because God has set eternity in the human heart and nothing else, no amount of work, pleasure, success, popularity can fill the void left in our hearts when mankind walked away from the Triune God and tried to hide.

So Solomon, the wisest man on earth, came to a very simple realization. True satisfaction in our labor has to come not from the work itself but from the hand of God, and to be satisfied we need to remember him. King Solomon’s simple epiphany is something God had written into creation from the very first week of the world. **“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore**

the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:11). He ceased from his activity, not because he was tired, but because he was finished. He blessed that day and set it aside as the Sabbath, the Hebrew word for “Rest”.

God built into the seven-day week a special day for his people to rest and commune with their Creator. This day was to bring rest and balance for his people from the six days of good, meaningful, satisfying work. That’s what God had put Adam in the garden to do, **“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 1:15).** Our work was never meant to be a burden but to give us purpose and enjoyment.

So Adam was the only one who ever had, at least for a time, the perfect work/rest balance until it was forever destroyed by the curse of sin that frustrates us all. **“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” (Genesis 1:17,18).** Does anyone have a hard time recognizing the painful toil of that curse all these years later?

So it became even more important than ever for people to find real rest from their painful toil, rest that could only come from one place--HIM

That’s why God commanded his people to observe the Sabbath day. First from Mount Sinai, God gave his people the commandments written on the tablets of stone and then again Moses repeats them as he’s preparing the people to enter the Promised land. We learn it as the third commandment, though God didn’t number them himself. He instructs and invites us to receive the gracious gift of rest from him, **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”**

How were they to keep a day holy? God spells out the exact specifications for his people to do. **“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work,”** not even your animals or servants, so that they may rest as you do. (Deuteronomy 12:14). Okay? well that doesn’t sound so hard. Americans are good at making “holy days” or “holidays”. Take weekends off and then take the first and last Monday’s of summer break and give everyone a holiday weekend to grill out and get up to the cabin.

Not quite the holy day God had in mind, but it at least illustrates how we set it aside from work. God is interested in a whole lot more than just giving us vacation time. The Sabbath rest is about more than just leisure. It’s about using the time for the purpose God gave it: **to remember HIM!** To remember what he has done for all of us. Moses reminded Israel, **“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” (Deuteronomy 5:15)**

The Exodus from Egypt was God’s mighty crowning act of deliverance in the Old Testament, pointing ahead to the salvation brought by Christ. It was for them what Good Friday and Easter are to us-the high point of God’s plan to save us. This is what he wanted his people to remember on that holy day. This is how they would keep the day holy, by using it to rest and find their identity in the ONE who created and redeemed them.

But the seventh day was not only a day to rest, it was also a day to gather, **“a day of sacred assembly.” (Leviticus 23:3).** And on it they were to gather together in the flesh to rehearse and remember the sacred truths of their faith. God the highest being in the universe held his people in the highest esteem so that he bent down to rescue them. That was their identity, God’s redeemed children. That’s the truth to build your identity on. You are the blood-bought children of God. That’s a truth to gently rock your restless mind to sleep at night.

Gathering, remembering, resting in God, these are the things at **the heart of the Sabbath**. God commands us to do these things not to burden us, but to give us a gift, the gift of himself. Isn't it ironic that while we try to solve our problems by letting our work and busyness and pleasure consume every last hour of the day, God gives us the real solution by chopping time out of our week to spend time with him completely guilt free--gathering, remembering, and finding rest.

If those concepts-- gathering, remembering, and resting-- sound a bit familiar, that's good! They should! They're the things we're doing at this very moment in **WORSHIP**. Gathering together with believers, remembering how God has rescued us from slavery to sin, and resting in the peace of forgiveness. **Worship** is the heart of the Sabbath that remains for us today when Christ has now fulfilled every aspect of the Old Testament Law. Our second lesson from Colossians 2 explained for us how Christ "**canceled the charge of legal indebtedness, (the charge of the law) which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.**" It's like he checked everything off on the to-do list and nailed it to the cross for everyone to see. Finished!

That's the reason that you don't have to be stoned to death if you mowed your lawn on Saturday. It's the reason we don't have to only offer church on Saturday the seventh day. Those stipulations and Sabbath days of the Old Testament Covenant "**are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.**" (Colossians 2:17). Now that Christ has come and stood before the eyes of the world, we don't waste time staring at his shadow on the ground, we look at Him! We worship Him! We gladly gather and hear and learn what he has to say.

That's the way Martin Luther taught the meaning of the Third Commandment. "**We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his word but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.**" (Small Catechism). That "What does this mean" explanation that I get to teach 7th graders in Catechism has been instilled deeply in the hearts of our people here at Mount Olive. I know that because when the different leaders and board members and faculty met to plan a vision for the future of Mount Olive over the next few years, we were asked to pick the core values of our congregation, values so foundational we don't even think about them consciously. The number 1 core value that was formulated: **Treasure God and his truth through Word and Sacrament**, which really just restates the third commandment. And Number 2: **Grow in faith and worship, personally and as a church family.**

So how do we put these core values into genuine practice? How do we keep the heart of the Sabbath in our hearts? Not just butts in pews or playing the livestream for background noise, but hearing, treasuring, and taking to heart the truth of God's Word, the foundation on which we build our identity. And gathering as well. The people of God gather. It's a part of our identity! As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, "**Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**" (Hebrews 10:24,25) So as a Family Growing in Christ, we gather to encourage one another and to receive the Lord's Supper together, a privilege we have today. Remembering, observing, treasuring God's Word and Sacrament. This is the foundation of our lives and the way we truly find rest. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."