

Behaviour appropriate for the Sabbath Mark 2:23-3:6

Behaviour appropriate for the Sabbath – what does that look like? Lots of people maintain that Sunday [the Christian Sabbath] just isn't Sunday without Church. Lots of other people maintain that they can worship God just as well on the golf course, out fishing, catching up on chores, hiking, sleeping in, at the cottage ...

For me, one of the most important things about Sunday and church is that Sunday is just about the only opportunity for the family to get together – the church family, the Christian family. It is the time when we can celebrate and give thanks; when we can ask for help and know that others are asking on our behalf; when we can offer moral support to others, even without knowing that they are needing that support, just by sitting alongside of them; and perhaps most important, it is a time when, as a family, we can rehearse the Christian story again – to ensure that we won't forget it, to ensure that there will never be a time when the story will be forgotten.

A number of years ago, I came across the following, a reminder of how important it is to rehearse, to review the stories of our faith, in full. These were written by actual students, and are untouched, unedited, genuine.¹ Consider with me what happens when people know only bits of the Biblical stories.

“In the first book of the Bible, Guinness, God got tired of creating the world, so He took the Sabbath off. Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. ... Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.

“... Samson was a strongman who let himself be led astray by a Jezebel like Delilah. Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the apostles.

“Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread without any ingredients. The Egyptians were all drowned in the desert. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Amendments. The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple. The Fifth Commandment is to humour thy father and mother. The Seventh Commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.

“Moses died before he ever reached Canada. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol. The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.

“David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar. He fought the Finklesteins, a race of people who lived in Biblical times. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.

“When Mary heard that she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta. When the three wise guys from the east side arrived, they found Jesus in the manager. ... St. John, the Blacksmith, dumped water on his head.

“Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says to do one to others before they do one to you. He also explained, 'Man doth not live by sweat alone.' It was a miracles when Jesus rose from the dead and managed to get the tomb stone off the entrance.



¹Compiled by Richard Lederer, appearing in the 12/31/95 edition of “National Review” magazine.

“The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 disciples. The epistles were written by the apostles. One of the apostles was St. Matthew who was by profession, a tax collector.

“St. Paul converted to Christianity. He preached holy matrimony, which is another name for marriage. A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monogamy.”

There is no question about the humour element – however, without consistent rehearsal of our faith stories, this could be how they would get distorted and finally lost.

So – one kind of behaviour that befits the Sabbath is joining the family of faith to remember the story together – to double check with members of the family to ensure that we’ve got the story right, to find encouragement as we try to apply the story and the teachings to our lives.

Now, having said all that, what did Jesus do about the Sabbath? What does his life show us is appropriate? Well ... it seems as though Jesus broke the rules of his day, concerning the Sabbath.

One Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples are going about and as they walk through a grain field, they pick some, to eat. They are hungry and it seemed a perfectly natural thing to do. The Pharisees remind Jesus of the unlawfulness of this act. Jesus responds by introducing the concept that the Sabbath is made for humankind, not the other way around. People are more important than laws.

Now, those among us who really dislike rules and regulations and other people telling us what we can and can’t do may think that this is our “out” when it comes to the commandments and even the laws of the land. But not so fast. Before our imagination gets too carried away, listen to Jesus’ next words. “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Watch what Jesus does next. Jesus and the disciples go to the synagogue. There, Jesus breaks the rules again. This time, to the fury of the Pharisees, he heals a man’s withered hand, on the Sabbath.

We live in a time where the emphasis is on our rights as individuals. It is a culture that exalts personal freedom, individual autonomy and the liberation of the self from all outside constraints. If it feels good, why shouldn’t I do it? And if I’m not hurting anyone else, then surely I have every right to do whatever I want whenever I want to do it.

I believe that Jesus would ask us, “but are you doing anything to help anyone else?” Avoiding hurting another is good. But actually helping another is what life and meaning and freedom are all about.

Jesus doesn’t break the Sabbath laws of his day on a lark. He isn’t setting up a test case for the Supreme Court on individual rights. His disciples are hungry. The man with the withered hand is suffering. The rules concerning the Sabbath had become a “god” in themselves. The rules God had given to bring people together and to ensure a wholeness and a holiness of life had replaced God. So, Jesus sets the rules aside in order to serve and worship the true God, the God of the Sabbath. Actually, he redefines the rules, setting people free to serve, not the rules, but the God who created them and would guide them.

Notice that we are set free to serve. It is not freedom to do anything and everything we want, for that is not true freedom. It is just servitude of a different sort. We are set free to serve God by serving one another. We are set free to call Jesus, Lord. We are set free to glorify God and to enjoy God forever. We are set free to receive from God, as Paul puts it, “extraordinary power” for the living of our days – power, that though we may be afflicted, we will never be crushed; though we may be perplexed, we will never be driven to despair; though

we may be persecuted, we will never be forsaken; though we may be struck down, we will never be destroyed.

Jesus gives the Pharisees a lesson on the purpose of the Sabbath. They had everything backwards. They wanted women and men to be slaves of the day. Jesus shows that the Sabbath day is a gift; a time of renewal; a time to remember and worship the God who made us and all that is; a time to be refreshed; a time set apart to restore our souls. The Sabbath is meant to remind us that we are never alone, that God is with us. It is meant to prepare us for whatever life might throw our way, to equip us for the service that gives life purpose and meaning and worth.