

**Grace, mercy and peace to you from the Lord our God,  
Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier! Amen.**

**SERMON THEME: "O Blessed Day of Rest!"**

**SERMON TEXT: Genesis 2:1-3 (Read first...)**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

**We have all heard it said that we learn best by example. Children are more apt to follow in their parent's footsteps because of what the parents do, rather than what they say. Words from a teacher are more likely to be validated and effective for instruction when the teacher does what he or she teaches!**

**So it is with God! He teaches us with words, but also by example! In the Scriptures we are taught the way of love in both the Law and the Gospel. We learn here of His great love for us, and also how we are to love Him and one another. But we also find that everything we learn in the Bible about love He has also shown us by doing, by setting an example.**

**We're familiar with the perfect life Jesus lived. He never committed a sin! His aim was always to love, and in doing so always glorified His heavenly Father! Christ Jesus, we read in Hebrews 4:15, was "in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin." He loved every sinner; forgave all who believed and repented, ministered to the poor, cared for the widow, defended the truth face-to-face with the Jewish rulers, and performed a host of miracles, including healing and raising the dead. Then came His sacrifice for the sins of all, giving Himself as our Substitute on that shameful cross! All the while *He was teaching how to love*, teaching by example! He was showing His disciples, teaching all of us, how to minister to bodies and souls, how to present ourselves as "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God," which Paul writes is our spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). He taught with words, but applied those words in what He did or did not do. Take, for instance, what he did on the sabbath day, the seventh day of the week: "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and He went to the synagogue, as was His custom..." (Luke 4:16).**

**Jesus went to a house of worship on the sabbath day. He**

always did. Why was this His habit or “custom”, His usual thing to do one day out of seven? Remember, Jesus never transgressed any of God’s holy commandments. He loved His Father! Already at the time of Moses God had commanded that one day of each week be hallowed, kept holy, set apart from all other days. One of those commandments—we call it the Third, some call it the Fourth—was to observe one day of each week as a sacred day, one in which all worldly things, all earthly cares, are set aside! In our catechetical instruction we abbreviate it: “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy...” (Exodus 20:8). But the commandment actually continues: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD God; in it you shall not do any work...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it” (vv. 9-11).

Let’s go back to Genesis 2 and see for ourselves. Verses 1-3: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day... So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all His work which He done in creation.”

After creating all that exists in six 24-hour days, the first thing God did was to set aside or designate one day for rest! The idea of a sabbath day did not come from any human being or church body! It did not surface only after the exodus when the Ten Commandments were given to Moses by God on Mt. Sinai. On the seventh day of time, God Himself ordained one day a week as holy—holy means sacred, not tainted by sin, of God, by God, to accomplish God’s purpose for man’s sake! When the Creator Himself, Almighty God, rested, He set an example for us to follow! God is a spirit, having no body of flesh; did He need rest? Jesus gives us an answer in Mark 2: “And Jesus said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for *man*, and not man for the sabbath’” (v. 27). God’s rest was for our benefit; it was intended to show that we should be resting and meditating on past blessings and the promise of more to come!

Again, God Himself, man’s Creator, was setting an example that would stand out for His creatures—you and me and all

people—for all time! It is His will that we follow His example, that we obey the words of the sabbath command spelled out in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and repeated in various ways throughout Scripture! Jesus obeyed... Who are we not to?

Actually, giving the sabbath command was an act of love and mercy! What curse did God place on Adam after he sinned? "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (Genesis 3:19), he was told. And because we, too, are sinners, we are still under the curse of having to work for a living. God enforces this edict when He says later in 2 Thessalonians, "If any one will not work, let him not eat" (3:10). Despite Adam's sin of disobedience and ours, God was, and remains, merciful; His grace becomes manifest; His love for His creations then, as now, has never ceased! What did He do, and still does? First, He is willing to forgive because of the sacrifice of His Son for our sake! The instant we are truly sorry for our sin, confess it, and repent of it, God is gracious to forgive! This is true every day of the week! Then, for one day a week, on the seventh day, God lifts the curse of labor; suspends it! One day a week every forgiven sinner can again be in closer fellowship with the Creator, like being in the Garden of Eden, devoting ourselves to God, having an intimate communion with our Creator and Lord of life! Every seventh day we have the opportunity to set our work aside, meditate on God's mercies and His glorious promise of redemption, and glorify Him for the gift of life and the wonders of creation! With joy we exclaim, "O Blessed Day of Rest!"

In short, the closeness Adam and Eve originally had with God could be relived after six days of labor! The flesh would be given a rest, and the spirit renewed! The sabbath was made for the good of God's people Israel, and for ours, an *ongoing reminder of God's mercy*! This day, today, Sunday, Easter Day, is our seventh day, a day of rest, the day following six days of labor. This is the crowning day of the week, the best day, a day to look forward to, a day of hope, a day for people made saints by the grace of God to come together to worship Him—to sing praises, to hear His holy Word and enjoy the fellowship of people made brothers and sisters by the blood of Jesus! When Scripture says, "Let us not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but (come to) encourage one another..." (Hebrews 10:25), it is for our good; our heavenly Father wants us to be refreshed and

strengthened for the week to come, and always have hope!

He wants us to enjoy the kind of loving fellowship that is unique to the Christian family! He wants us to know the highest joy and peace possible, which comes to us as the forgiveness of our sins is pledged and sealed in the Sacrament of the Altar! Our God wants to shower every blessing upon us, freely, for Jesus' sake, when we do His holy will! Most of all, He wants us to be sure of our eternal destiny, which reminds us that the house of God is "the (very) gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17)!

Sunday is the usual day people of God around the world rest their bodies and nourish their souls. Yet, especially here in America, the Lord's Day has become a day of recreation, pleasure, getting away from work alright, but to satisfy the flesh, not to feed the soul in sacred worship. There are those who would never steal or kill or commit adultery or hurt anyone—keeping these commandments in the second table of the law. But at the same time, they don't think twice about hurting God, about avoiding hearing His holy Word, singing praises to Him, or partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper. Some treat the Ten Commandments as only nine. "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy..." is to be kept just as much as "Thou shall not kill", or "Thou shall not steal..." , or any of the other commands of God. Remember what we were taught from Luther's Small Catechism? God "insists on strict and perfect obedience" to His holy will. Jesus affirmed this: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In another place—John 14:15—Jesus said, "If you love Me you will keep My commandments." And we know love is even greater than faith! (1 Corinthians 13:13). This is one reason we need the Holy Spirit by our side all the time, to help us, move us to be in the Word and in worship, and ever conscious of how to please our Lord! Remember, faith without love is dead.

In our weak moments we do fail; all the more reason to come before the throne of grace and confess our sins and hear those blessed words of absolution, "You, My child, are forgiven!" To remain close to our dear Lord now, to know without doubting that we are destined for glory at the end of our days here, we do well to follow our heavenly Father's example and that of our Lord Jesus, and truly, from the heart, set aside the seventh day for

**rest and worship! No one has to be here; we should want to come to worship! When the sabbath is celebrated regularly we draw closer to our precious Lord; our zeal for service is renewed. God's house is the one island in the stormy sea of life where we are promised the Lord will meet us and let us feel His presence! It is here that the Body of Christ, the church, and its Head, Jesus Christ, are joined in a baptismal bond, loving, serving, sacrificing, hoping, rejoicing—all to the glory of the Father who so graciously lifted the curse and gave us this blessed day of rest!**

**A time is coming when every day will be a day of rest, when we'll be worshiping together with the angels, singing that never-ending doxology, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:12). May the Lord of earth's sabbath grant us a clear vision of the heavenly rest soon to come! In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**Rev. Donald P. Tonack**

