

Sunday May 28  
Lesson 13: Celebrating Sabbath  
Scripture: Luke 4: 16-21

**Context:**

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In this final lesson of our third unit, “Sabbath,” we continue to focus on how God has created humans to rest and be replenished with the practice of sabbath. Today we will focus on rejoicing in the gift of sabbath.

Our lesson today comes from the New Testament in the gospel of Luke. The passage does not follow what we might think of as a passage on the sabbath. Instead, we see Jesus performing a specific role and then moving on. Yet a deeper dive into the text has several things coming into view.

The passage comes after Jesus has both been baptized and then tempted in the desert by Satan. He begins his Galilean ministry where he will fully claim his identity. Luke places the visit to his hometown as first because it announces who Jesus is, of what his ministry consists, what his church will be and do, and what will be the response to both Jesus and the church.<sup>1</sup> As Jesus goes to his hometown synagogue, he sets the tone for the future of his ministry.

When Jesus goes to the synagogue, he goes through the customary tradition of attending the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, all Jews would go to the synagogue, the local house of worship. As part of the service, there was a time for the men to stand and read scripture. The synagogue services were informal, consisting of prayers, reading of scripture, comments, and collecting alms for the poor.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, the synagogue was multi-purposed. The synagogue had these services and was also a school, a community center, and a place for administering justice.<sup>3</sup> As Jesus worshipped there, he would have been at the center of his community, surrounded by all those who had known him since childhood.

When Jesus stands up to speak, he comes to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was known for telling the people of a Messiah who would come and redeem the people. Isaiah 61 is known as the servant song, and “anointed me” means “made me the Christ or Messiah.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus was giving them his identity and telling them of what he will bring them. This Christ will bring hope to the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. Jesus will be their liberator and give them a path to look forward to. Jesus concludes this speech by saying, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.”

The focus for today is the word “jubilee.” Jubilee focuses on celebration and rest, a term brought about in the Old Testament as a time to restore and celebrate. Jesus says this time is now and the people should enjoy it today. The Sabbath is here for humans to rejoice.

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock, Fred B. “Luke.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## **Application**

At one of the current churches I serve, there is a large stained-glass window you can see from the main street. The window presents Jesus holding a lamb amidst the backdrop of a pastoral setting. During the evening, it lights up. So, if you are driving at night, you can look and see the window clearly as the rest of our sleepy little town rests with the lights off.

I love seeing the window as I drive home from being out of town for several reasons. The first and foremost being how Jesus is the light in the darkness, the one who always shines. And the second reason I love it is because as I see him holding a sheep, I am reminded of how much our Lord invites us to rest in him.

In the passage we were invited to read and explore today, we are reminded of how Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and he is the one who invites us to rest in him. His teaching at his hometown synagogue sought to emphasize he comes to bring hope and healing to all he meets. And he also reminds us of Jubilee, of celebrating and rejoicing by resting.

One of my observations of the struggle in this world is we do not know how to rest. We are happy to run around with to-do lists jumping from thing to thing and worrying about one issue to the next. We glorify busyness because it's as if we place our worth in productivity or always being in control. It is as if we cannot rejoice in just being alive and seeing life as a gift.

Perhaps one of the reasons Jesus said all these things and then concluded with "This has been fulfilled in your hearing," is he saw the temptation we as humans have to always focus on what we can achieve or accomplish. Jesus wants us to instead see how he does those things. He is the one who brings hope. He is the one who liberates people. He is the one who will heal the sin sick souls and lead us to where we need to be.

What he wants us to do is to enjoy this life. He wants us of course to give back to society and to glorify him. Yet he invites us to observe the Sabbath and to also rest and trust in him completely.

I have loved writing for this series because it has made me reexamine how I observe Sabbath a little more clearly. I have realized how it is such a challenge at times! You get a text from someone about work and before you know it, thirty minutes are gone, and you have not rested. Or we get convicted we need to do something, and we give of ourselves so there is no time left for us.

Yet as we read passages such as these, we are reminded of how vital the Sabbath is for our own well-being and for the communities we live in as well. It is as we observe Sabbath, we take on the rhythm God gave us for living and we are reminded of how God made us to be rested and renewed. We can look to see how our souls and bodies want to be rejuvenated and to delight in how God made the Sabbath for good.

For me, there are two times I think of as Sabbath and both are essential for my emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. The first is the day off. For me, this is Friday. It is a day where I do not go to the office, I only check in for emergencies, and I try to decompress. Some days, I do nothing but read or shut everything down. Other days I can connect to God's creation, or I spend time with the ones I love. When I skip those kinds of days, I can feel it in my mind and body. I hope all those reading have a day where you can just be!

The second Sabbath I think of is Sunday. This is the day where I lead my congregations in worship. Even though it is a "workday" for me, I still feel excitement and also at times nerves to make it as meaningful day for those who gather to worship so they too can have Sabbath, hearing the good news of Jesus so they may know of God's love, grace, and presence in their lives. I find it of the upmost privilege to lead in worship as it fits in with what one of my

preaching professors, Bishop Joe Pennel, spoke of how worship is the great hour where a foretaste of heaven is given. It is the combination of praise, praying, receiving the sacraments, and the proclamation of Word where we are reminded of how we are to rest and trust in the Lord God. Just as Jesus stood up in the synagogue to worship, he invites us to do the same.

How do you observe the Sabbath? Why do you think Sabbath encourages us to rejoice in the Lord? What practices do you keep making sure you observe rest and relaxation? How has God used the Sabbath to rejuvenate you? Why do you think the Sabbath is a counter-cultural observation in today's world?

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