

## ***Sermon: Sabbath, a Day of Rest or a Day to Stay Awake?***

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**Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory**

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How are you doing on your Epiphany star word? If you were with us a few weeks ago during worship and before on Instagram Cam, Dan and others were virtually handing out words for each of us to ponder. Don, you got Simplicity. Shelleen, received Power. Tamara got Rise Up.

My word was Solitude. My comment back on Instagram was, “tricky one for me. Worth investigating. Thanks.”

If I am perfectly honest, I didn’t investigate. Even during this time of increased isolation, being alone—finding solitude—isn’t something I seek or desire. I like people. I like busyness. For all of you extroverts, I am with you, and I pray you are holding it together through the pandemic.

One reason I don’t love solitude is that I tend to avoid uncomfortable or painful things, so I typically don’t leave a lot of quiet time. Mark’s account of Jesus’ ministry and call to justice is about as uncomfortable as it gets for this privileged, white, western gal.

I am going to talk about today’s reading in a moment, but if we skip ahead a bit, in Mark 13, Jesus tells his followers and Mark’s readers (us!) to Stay

Awake! Jesus wants us (especially those of us who hold privilege) to not look away from both the horror and hope of living under empire. Standing with the marginalized, speaking truth to power, giving to the poor is also very important—and we will get into that more with today’s reading—but in a parable late in the book, Jesus demands that we “resist the Imperial coma” as Ched Meyers puts it, and stay awake.

In Martin Luther King Jr’s last sermon given before he was assassinated, he talks about staying awake, in fact the sermon is called, *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution*. Preaching on a piece from the book of Revelations, King says, “And one of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses, that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution.”

Stay awake.

I would argue that like during Dr. King’s time, we are now (or still) living through a period of social change and we are all navigating what new attitudes and responses this change demands.

One common response we have seen a lot, even in the last year, is initial collective rage or frustration with injustice, that slowly (or quickly) turns unfocused and then dissolves into apathy.

Stay awake.

When we turn in—to ourselves, our families, our churches—we risk getting lost in a dream. An illusion that if we just fix this habit, or get better at that thing, or solve a personal problem, THEN we will be able to turn outward again and figure out this whole justice for all thing. But in the meantime, we slept through it. Maybe, if our slumber was deep enough, we even ended up on the wrong side of history.

And that is what is happening with the Pharisee from today's text. They are religious leaders of a Jewish sect that is very focused on purity and rules. I bet they wanted to be good people, faithful people, but in Mark's telling of Jesus' story, they become the heavies and the antiheroes.

The two stories from our Gospel reading focus on the Sabbath. First, Jesus' disciples are scolded for gleaning wheat on day when transit, sowing and reaping are all disallowed. Then Jesus, in an act of civil disobedience heals a man, in the synagogue no less on the Sabbath.

Our reading from Deuteronomy also lays out pretty clearly that work is banned on the Sabbath. We know that Jesus is devout—he even flashes his knowledge of Torah at the Pharisee by telling them the story of David from first Samuel, where he and his men eat a bread offering from the Temple.

So what is Jesus doing? Is he flipping the bird to his culture and faith—to the laws God has given his people? No, I don't think so. Jesus is actually digging deeper and casting wider. He is drawing from a breadth of laws and counsel housed in the Torah. For example, Leviticus 19 dictates that farmers should not reap to the edges of their fields, but instead leave them for the poor and alien.

This is not a matter of charity, but a matter of justice. Hungry people have a right to food. Like David, Jesus and his friend were hungry. I suspect that Jesus' interpretation is that their need trumps whatever laws exist. In the book of Hosea it says, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

God is asking humanity to practice compassion not to deny themselves, or to scold already marginalized people.

The kingdom that Jesus is teaching about, God's Kingdom, draws from this culture, these laws, and also Jesus' experience in Roman occupied Palestine. God's kingdom is about shared abundance, cooperation and redistribution, not about fasting and purity rituals only available to the wealthy and privileged.

Similarly when Jesus heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, he is accused of indecency, and responds—"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" The Pharisee stayed quiet. Their silence angered Jesus, and I get that. But I also get the Pharisee's silence. It is easy to go to sleep, especially when change threatens how you understand the world and your place in it.

There are lots of metaphors about not being able to see your situation or culture objectively—forest for the trees, a fish knowing nothing of water, taking a girl out of the country. Another one is "you can take the slave out of Egypt, but you can take Egypt out of the slave."

This of course refers to the Exodus story. After wandering around in the wilderness, the Israelites start wishing for slavery. Seems crazy, but it is the only life they have ever known.

After that God sends bread from heaven—Manna. This is a test, to see if the chosen people will understand and obey God's alternative economic model.

The rules around manna were simple:

- First, those who gathered much, didn't have too much. Those who gathered less, had enough. Greed and scarcity aren't welcome in this new model.
- Second, the manna should not be stored up. Accumulation of wealth is the law of capitalism—not scripture.
- And finally, God commanded to keep the Sabbath. You can't gather manna on the Sabbath. Sabbath is the bedrock for a culture of constraint. Sabbath disrupts our addictive need to maximize the forces of production.

Three rules.

Now not working on the Sabbath is not about going hungry. It is not about inflicting pain. Jesus tells the Pharisee, the Sabbath was made FOR humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.

It is worth noting that during Jesus' time—much like today—peasant farmers were forced to produce crops that would not simply nourish their families and communities, but would be shipped off to store houses for the ruling class.

Having a day to rest from toiling on someone else's behalf is not a foreign concept to us. The 5-day work week was fought for and achieved by trade unionists a hundred years ago. Having said that, the words shared with me by my favourite cook at Lumsden Beach Camp when I was a 15 year old kitchen helper also ring in my ears—"man may work from sun to sun, but women's work is never done." I try to remember that Jesus demanded justice for all—rest for all. There are many in our society who can not enjoy Sabbath, and they (unsurprisingly) are generally low income or marginalized. Care givers, working students, minimum wage earners supporting families, and many more that I am sure you can imagine, so often are unable to enjoy a proper Sabbath. They need to keep gleaning in order to not go hungry.

The heart of Sabbath is justice for all—no scarcity, no overconsumption, no accumulation of wealth. What a beautiful economic model, especially from where we sit, in a world amidst climate crisis fueled by consumption, where the gap between rich and poor is larger than ever, and where those of us in the middle feel nearly powerless as we are constantly told stories of shortage and raised on a diet of austerity.

Jesus is not disobeying his God. He is throwing shade at the practices and customs that forget that the greatest commandment is love—love your God and your neighbour.

Now you can understand why Mark's gospel is so uncomfortable. Just like "ya can't get Egypt out of the slave", I find it hard to get the patriarchal, white

supremacist, capitalist out of me. Even as I am inspired by the vision of the kingdom Jesus shared, I so often lack imagination on how to get there.

Luckily there many creative and justice demanding folks out there.

The Regina Community Fridge on Dewdney was started by some folks who saw examples in other cities and brought the idea here. Now another group of Regina citizens, including Knox-Met's own Morgan Campbell, are looking to start a second fridge in the Heritage neighbourhood since the North Central fridge is so well used.

The Awasiw warming station—mean A Place of Hope— has been a haven for so many people who deal with housing insecurity in our city.

A network called the Treaty Land Sharing Network—is responding to changes to trespassing laws in Saskatchewan. The Network is a group of farmers, ranchers, and rural people who have come together to begin the crucial work of honouring Treaties. In the spirit of sharing the land, they provide safe places for Indigenous people to access land and exercise their rights. They are committed to advancing land-based reconciliation, engaging in ongoing learning and practicing at being Treaty people. Lumsden Beach Camp is a member of this network, and Knox-Met was involved by offering assistance in the early days when the network was still forming.

Beyond our province, civil society organizations have successfully lobbied to get January 29 designated as a National Day of Remembrance for the deadly shooting that took place at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City four

years ago on Friday. This designation is a reminder both of the lives lost, but also the work ahead to dismantle racism.

Globally, regular investors like you and me are shining a light on the greed of hedge fund managers by buying stocks in businesses—like AMC, GameStop, Blackberry and others. This economic activism hopes to show the world that hoarders of wealth are placing bets on the failure of businesses and the loss of livelihoods in order to increase their riches.

In the wilderness, when the disciples asked Jesus what to do with the 5000 hungry people who had gathered, Jesus told them, “you feed them”. The people seeking justice in these stories are taking that command (even if they didn’t hear it from Jesus first). They are feeding people—from fridges to foraging, from dismantling racism to disrupting the market. Each of these stories, and the many more acts of justice happening in our communities and beyond demonstrate that another way is possible—that the principles of Sabbath are timeless and universal.

A fridge and warm place so that people have enough.

Sharing land and overpowering greed so that wealth circulates instead of accumulates.

A day of remembrance to rest and regroup, for the struggle is long.



Here we are, participating in part of our Sabbath ritual as followers of Christ. For me, this hour each week provides manna for my inner life and a reminder to stay awake. A weekly reminder to love God and neighbour, even when my privilege wants to push snooze.

But even in our unknowing. Even when we have a lack of imagination. God is with us. We are never alone. Thanks be to God.