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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

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Proper 16, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary

[Isaiah 58:9b-14](#)

[Psalms 103:1-8](#)

[Hebrews 12:18-29](#)

[Luke 13:10-17](#)

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“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”

That’s one of the Ten Commandments, either #3 or #4 depending on whose numbering system you use. They aren’t actually numbered in either of the two places they appear in Scripture, so Jews, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and other Protestants have all developed slightly different numbering systems.

Those two places are the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. And each one gives a different rationale for this commandment. Exodus says: “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy ... for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” So in Exodus the Sabbath is based on God’s own day of rest after the creation.

But Deuteronomy says: “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy ... (for) you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” So in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath is based on liberation: the day of rest is a sign that the people of Israel are no longer slaves who must work seven days a week, but the free people of God.

Today we hear about Jesus performing an act of liberation on the Sabbath. He even seems to suggest it’s especially appropriate on the Sabbath. His rationale is that if some forms of work, like feeding and watering your animals to sustain life, are appropriate on the Sabbath, then how much more should the life of a child of God be restored to wholeness on this day. Jesus is acting as a rabbi giving an interpretation of the Law, one that differs from the synagogue leader’s interpretation. Often this passage has been misused by Christians to portray all of Judaism as a kind of loveless, rules-driven religion, and to portray the Sabbath as a kind of joyless day where people aren’t allowed to do anything fun. Anyone who’s ever spent Shabbat with an observant Jewish friend knows better. The Sabbath is a day of joy and love, family, prayer, and play. In opposing the synagogue leader Jesus isn’t setting aside Judaism or the Law; he’s stepping into a rich stream of tradition of interpreting the Law on how to honor Shabbat as a day of both rest and liberation.

There's another misunderstanding Christians have often fallen into about the Sabbath, and that's to apply the word and the concept to Sunday. Sometimes we hear Sunday called a "Christian Sabbath." But from the very beginning Christians understood Sunday as something different from the Sabbath. The earliest Christians, who were Jews, kept Sabbath on Saturday—and met together *after* the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week. It's certainly appropriate to treat Sunday as a special day, to refrain from work when we're able, and to do family and church things on Sunday. But we miss the mark when we think of Sunday as a kind of replacement Sabbath, especially when that becomes the same kind of joyless stereotype that was wrong in the first place. From a Christian perspective, Saturday is the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, a day of rest—one that's not binding on Christians who are Gentiles, but to be respected nonetheless. Sunday is the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, the day the world was first created and the day the world was recreated when Jesus burst out of the tomb to launch a new era of history.

So we gather on the Lord's Day. And although it's not the Sabbath, our worship should still carry some of those qualities of both rest and liberation, which aren't opposites but part of a single unified whole.

Take out a prayer book for a moment, the red book in the pew rack. Turn to page 855. This is part of the Episcopal Church's catechism, a simple overview of the church's teaching. If you haven't seen it before, I recommend reading the whole thing. It's short! If you don't have a prayer book at home, it's available online.¹ Let's read just the first two questions and answers on this page:

¹ See *The Online Book of Common Prayer*, <https://bcponline.org/Misc/catechism.html>.

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Sometimes we think of worship on the one hand and mission on the other. We might think of going to church on Sundays to refuel our gas tank, and then going out the rest of the week to practice our mission of doing justice. But in reality it's much more intermingled than that. We are doing justice right here, right now, as we worship. We are praying for ourselves and our neighbors. We are sharing the peace of Christ with friends and strangers. We are treating one another with courtesy and reverence, sharing the body and blood of Christ together, young and old, rich and poor at the same rail, receiving the same food and drink, all receiving enough, none receiving too much. Our worship in this place is a rehearsal of heaven right here on earth. And it transforms lives. Worship is not a luxury we let ourselves indulge in so we can get about the real hard work of doing good. Worship is part of mission, not separate from it.

And mission is part of worship too. When we share food or drink with someone who's hungry. When we advocate for housing for everyone who needs it, or for due process and fair treatment for immigrants authorized and unauthorized, or for reducing our energy footprint and caring better for God's creation.. When we do the hard work of loving our families and friends and coworkers and neighbors in Jesus' name—each of those things is also an act of worship, because it gives praise and glory to God.

Today Jesus lifts up a woman who has been bowed down for eighteen years. Today still he is lifting us up too, and enlisting us with him in sharing his mission: a mission of worship and prayer, of justice and service; a mission that continues until that great Sabbath when our rest and our liberation are both complete.