

The Sabbath Day was a day of rest. God instructed the people of Israel not to do any ordinary work on that day. Jesus was buried in Joseph Arimathea's unused grave right next to where he was crucified. They buried him there before the sun went down on Friday evening, because they needed to get ready for the Sabbath Day. They took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen clothes with spices, and they laid him in the tomb. Then they all went home for the Sabbath rest. But were they at rest on that Sabbath Day? No, they were filled with grief. They were restless. So as soon as the sun came up, very early on Sunday morning, the women rushed to the tomb to check on Jesus' body and anoint it with spices. They were eager to get back to work and make sure their Lord had a proper burial. The Sabbath Day was a day of rest. But they were ready to get to work on Sunday.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath Day was meant to teach Israel that their rest comes from the Lord. The Lord rested on the seventh day after he had created the heavens and the earth. He rested, because his work was done. He was satisfied with his work. He said that it was very good. So he established this Sabbath Day to teach them about his rest. It was to be a Sabbath – a rest – to the Lord. This rest they were to give for their bodies was a sign of the rest they have in their loving Creator. It was a sign that God has done all things well. He has finished his work. And when God has finished his work we can be at rest. When God is satisfied, we are satisfied. When God is at peace, we are at peace. Jesus therefore says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, because he is the Lord of creation. But when he came in the flesh, he worked on the Sabbath. He healed the sick, the lame, and the blind. He came to finish the work his Father gave him to do, because he was preparing for a much greater Sabbath than that day designated at the end of the week. He said, "My Father has been working until now, and so I am working." He is one with the Father, accomplishing the same work as the Father. In perfect obedience to his Father, Jesus brought about a new creation where righteousness dwells. He brought about his kingdom. He would establish peace with God for fallen and sinful men. He would give rest to those who are weary over their sin. But until that time, he had work to do.

Now, not all of the people of Israel stopped working on the Sabbath Day. There was one group of people who still had to work. They were the priests. Jesus had reminded the Pharisees of this when they pestered him about working on the Sabbath. He said, "Haven't you read in the Law that the priests in the temple work on a Sabbath as on other days and yet do no wrong? I tell you, here is something greater than the temple" (Matt 12:5-6). Jesus came as the high priest, offering something much greater than bulls and goats. He entered into the most holy place before the throne of his Father, offering his own blood on the altar of the cross. His entire life and ministry was a preparation for this sacrifice to take away sins. And it was by this work of Christ, by this single offering of his dear life, that God was satisfied. God was finally at rest. As the blood of the Passover lamb was spread on the doorposts of Israel to save them from the Lord's judgment against Egypt, now the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, cleanses us and frees us from God's judgment over the whole world. Jesus is the true high priest, anointed by his Father. And he finished the work his Father gave him to complete.

When Jesus declared, "It is finished" from the cross, this marked the end of his work. When he cried out, "Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit," he entered into his rest. But he didn't rest for his own sake. No, but just as he rested on that first Seventh Day, here our Lord rested because his work for his beloved creation was finished. He rested so that we may have rest.

So as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the women rushed to bury Jesus' body before the Sabbath, while they worked hard to get him in the tomb in a dignified way, our Lord was already at rest. He was already honored by his Father with more dignity than any of our works can bestow. He was at rest, sleeping in the tomb, declaring his victory over the forces of hell, having satisfied his Father's anger and reconciled the world of sinners by his blood.

Before they knew it, while they were still toiling and laboring both inside and out, Christ had already accomplished their peace and their rest. While they obeyed the Sabbath law, doing no ordinary work, yet all the while restlessly grieving their Lord's death, Christ had already ushered in the eternal rest, which he freely gives to poor sinners. Jesus had already burst out of the tomb. Death could not hold him. Just as he would walk through the closed doors seven days later, doors that were shut out of fear of the Jews, so he burst forth from the tomb. Like Perez who came bursting out of his mother's womb, Christ was came out of the womb of the grave. He has won for us a new birth, which he gives us freely in our baptism, the sure hope that we will rise to live with him forever.

So here the women are, early on Sunday morning, eager to do more work for Jesus. They wonder who will roll away the stone for them. But when they arrive, the stone has already been rolled away. And yet, this stone wasn't rolled away for Jesus. No, it was rolled away for us. Christ has already risen. He has already finished all the work. He sent his angels to roll away the stone and announce this good news to these first witnesses of the resurrection.

The resurrection reveals that the work has all been accomplished. God is satisfied. Our righteousness has already been accomplished. God has already declared us righteous in his sight. He has already been reconciled. He already does not count our iniquities against us. Our sins are already forgiven. Nothing we do adds anything to this. Not even our faith or our most pious worship adds anything. It is finished. God is at rest. This is what his Word declares. It is what Jesus gave his disciples to proclaim to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Believe what? Baptized into what? That God has made peace by the blood of Jesus' cross. That Christ has taken away all sin. That God has set his anger at rest forever. So whoever believes this has exactly what Christ accomplished: peace with God and eternal rest from all sin, guilt, and sorrow.

By resting on that Sabbath Day and rising on that Sunday, Jesus has made all things new, which is why we are no longer bound to the ceremonies of the old Law of Moses. He has made all things clean, which is why we are no longer required to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. The old seventh day Sabbath has run its course. We are therefore no longer required to refrain from work on Saturdays. But this does not mean that Jesus has merely changed it to another day of the week. Sunday is not the new Sabbath Day. Instead, every day, when we rest in Christ, we are enjoying God's Sabbath. Of course, God still wants us to give our homes and workers a day off for bodily rest. That's simply the loving thing to do. But the rest we have in Jesus continues even when we are working.

Sunday isn't a new Sabbath Day. Sometimes we might refer to it as a Sabbath Day, since it is the day we have set apart to gather around God's Word and sacraments. The apostles called it the Lord's Day, because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead. Since then, the church has gathered every Sunday to celebrate our Lord's resurrection. Our Lutheran Confessions say that the service of the Lord's Supper is "celebrated among us every Lord's Day and on the other festivals. The Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved" (Ap. XXIV, 1). Every Sunday, we celebrate the Lord's resurrection by gathering around his gospel promise. We do this every Sunday, not

because Sunday has taken the place of Saturday in the New Testament. No, but it is to confess that Christ has given us an everlasting rest, which transcends our work week, our labors, and all our struggles against sin and temptation. The resurrection of Christ is God's eternal proclamation that he is satisfied, at peace, and reconciled with us.

And this means that his Word is not bound. When you hear the gospel this morning and receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, you aren't just starting over from last week. It isn't as if all the sins you commit after you walk out these doors just pile up until the next time you go to church. Going to church, hearing the gospel, and receiving the sacrament are not works you render to God to pacify him and get rid of your sins. No, God has been pacified by the work of his Son, and the promise of Christ's body and blood continues to give us this sure pledge. Christ's resurrection declares for all time the forgiveness of your sins, and he gives us this assurance through his Word. In fact, his Word is the very power of his Son's resurrection. It is the lasting food for our souls, helping us fight against temptation, confident that God does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. So when we walk out of church this morning, his Word doesn't remain bound to these walls. It goes with us. It goes before us, just as Christ went before his disciples into Galilee. It doesn't remain bound to this pulpit or to whomever is standing by the altar. No, it continues to strengthen even the simplest Christian with the certainty of God's peace in Christ.

This is why the angel told the women to go and report Christ's resurrection to his disciples. He wasn't calling them to be apostles or preachers. He only called certain men to do that. But his Word isn't bound to men. It doesn't depend on this or that class of people. The Word of Christ has free course among all of his people. All who take refuge in his death and resurrection find rest for their souls in his Word of life.

As we receive a foretaste of his kingdom right now, we have a foretaste of the new and eternal Sabbath rest of our Savior. His work is done. God is satisfied. We have rest and peace in Christ. He is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.*