The Original Congregational Church

A Sermon Delivered on June 20, 2021

***Divine Work***

We don’t usually think of Jesus as a rule breaker.

We want Jesus to show us the way to keep all of God’s laws.

Especially we get concerned if someone else is breaking God’s laws.

Today we come upon Jesus defending himself in a conversation with the legalists.

His detractors said, “You’re not supposed to work on the Sabbath—it is forbidden.”

Jesus replies, “My Father is still working—I am still working.”

The legalists were outraged.

“Jesus broke the Sabbath rule!”

“Jesus calls the Lord of Creation his ‘Father who art in Heaven.’ Blasphemy!”

Why the outrage? What had Jesus done on the Sabbath?

On the day of rest Jesus was doing God’s work.

Jesus worked to give another person rest.

It all started at the pool.

In Bethesda the hot springs attract hundreds of people.

When the steam stirs up the water, minerals are released, and relief from ailments are found.

Jesus sees a person who can’t make it down to the water when it is stirring.

Because of his condition people referred to this person as an invalid.

Jesus is moved with compassion because no child of God is in valid.

So Jesus asks the weary child of God, “Do you want to be made well?”

The person had lots of excuses. “I can’t do it. Everyone else gets there before me.”

Jesus says, “Get up. Take your mat. Go and enjoy a nice long walk.”

That’s it.

That’s the miracle.

Jesus put to rest the calling of this person an invalid.

The detractors, the legalists, they were outraged.

“Nobody works on the Sabbath.”

“Nobody can authorize a divine healing except for us.”

For centuries we have struggled mightily with what to do on the Sabbath.

The legalists would say you can’t even turn on a light switch.

No sowing, no plowing, no reaping, no kneading, no hunting, no baseball, no BBQ!

Back in 321 the Roman emperor made it a law that all must observe the Sabbath.

The civic government turned the Sabbath into a dreary day of forced obligation.

Our puritan forbearers allowed for one activity: reading the Holy Scriptures.

Let’s take a quick look at the Holy Scriptures.

The prophet Isaiah says, “The Sabbath is a day to take delight in the Lord.”

Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for us—we were not made for the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath day is given to us as a gift of God.

We are to put at rest our usual go to work selves.

When we cease our daily labor we open our day for other things.

The Sabbath day is a day set apart for joy.

What about working towards love, friendship, community, worship, singing, praying?

What about spending time for the joy of family and taking delight in sharing great food?

Jesus broke the Sabbath rule according to the legalists.

Yet according to the spirit of the day, Jesus was showing us how to keep it well.

If one child of God is being called in-valid, then no one can be completely at rest.

Jesus shows us not how to follow the Sabbath rules but to become Sabbath to each other.

If we put to rest our anxious rules-making and fairness finding, another may be healed.

Say nothing and just listen to another who is in need. Be a Sabbath rest to them.

Poet William Butler Yeats tells us: We can make our minds so like still water, that beings gather about us, that they may see their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even a fiercer life, life because of our quiet.

So let us do divine work on the Sabbath!

Let us become a Sabbath rest to those in our circle and beyond.

Let us soothe the souls whose troubles have them all stirred up.

Jesus says, “My Father who art in heaven is still working—so I am still working.”

Oh Lord, may we become an occasion for holy rest and stillness and new beginnings.

Amen.

PRAYER

Take a moment for stillness and silence on this Sabbath Day.

Dear God,

We thank you for the gift of the Sabbath Day and this gift of This Sabbath Day.

Thank you for the breath of life that we hear in the wind of the trees,

That comes from the plankton in the sea

That flows from you to me!

On This Sabbath Day, Oh Lord we remember our parents, our fathers and grandfathers.

We bless them and honor them, and we remember them with love.

May all your children find the joy of strong grown ups in their life.

We thank you for showing to us the secret wisdom of Sabbath keeping.

Like the grains of beach on the sand, your wisdom is all around us, countless in measure.

Open our minds to your wisdom.

Open our hearts to your love.

Open our bodies to healing.

Oh Lord, make us to be a Sabbath resting place for all we meet.

Help us to be still, to quiet our own anxiety, that others may speak to us.

In our listening, let us give a holy rest to another’s worrying mind.

When we come upon a person whose all stirred up with troubles,

Help us to calm the swirling waters of their soul, and set them free.

O Lord, our deliverer,

We remember on the Sabbath that you set all your children free from bondage.

Help us with our work and life balance that we remain steadfast and ready to serve.

Encourage us, not to be so quick to judge others by the rules, but to practice the rule of love.

Still this world from war.

Soothe the aching souls who suffer.

And, bring a deep and enduring peace to all. We pray. Amen.