**Text**: **Mark 2:23-3:6**

**The Bethel Pulpit**

**Pastor Martha Butzier**

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How would you describe your life style? In short, lifestyle is the way we choose to live our daily lives. It includes our interests, our opinions, our behaviors. It reveals our values. It’s how others can tell whether we what we say really matches up to what we do. Martha, what can this possibly have to do with Jesus and what our gospel reading?

Jesus has just called his disciples; Jesus asks them to follow, and they drop everything they are doing and join him. It is safe to say the twelve didn’t have any idea what they were getting into. They were called to a new way of living, a new lifestyle, a life of discipleship. The early chapters of Mark set the tone for us; they show us through the life of Jesus what discipleship looks like. Today’s reading reintroduces us to what it means to take Sabbath time.

As Jesus responds to the religious authorities, they all know God’s command to keep the sabbath holy. What they don’t agree on is the purpose of the sabbath time. Closely related is the common question, “Mom, why do I have to go to church?”

On most Sunday’s I just feel better after I have been to church. But Jesus is driving at something of greater importance than you and me feeling good after worship. Sabbath time is a matter of redirecting our attentions. It’s a matter of emptying our minds of all the significant and insignificant events, so we can be receptive to the voice of God. And in the listening with clear minds, now set on the same sight line as God, we find that our hearts are softened. Along with a heart that God has renewed, we see our need for forgiveness; we see the needs of those around us; we even begin to see the needs of people we do not know and probably never will.

What has been overlooked, forgotten, maybe even trounced on often by us and by the Pharisees is this commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus, the Son of Man, has shown us what makes the Sabbath so important to us all. Just look at what he does. He feeds those who were hungry and restored a man’s withered hand making it possible for him to support his family. He took the way of love and forgiveness and new life when he saw there was a need.

It wasn’t some random act that Jesus supplies; He brings heaven and earth together. Today we see the Kingdom of God in our midst. Too often we in our busyness lose track of this promise that the kingdom of God is not some far off heavenly realm for which we wait. We experience the kingdom here and now. Life on earth isn’t something we are waiting to escape. The kingdom is now, it is here. Just as surely as God is here. God wants our participation to reveal the kingdom, the coming together of earth and heaven.

In the words of Bishop Michael B. Curry in his message at the royal wedding, “Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of human history.  A movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world.  And a movement mandating people to live that love.  And in so doing, to change not only their lives, but the very life of the world itself.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ with the help and guidance of God, we can change the world to look like the Kingdom of God. To do that, keeping Sabbath time is essential, to be renewed and refreshed and reoriented away from the busyness of our lives. We need the time out, time with God to be able to adjust our focus away from ourselves, toward the Son of Man and his revolutionary movement.

We get so wrapped up in what we have come to see as the way things must be. That’s exactly what the Evil One wants, for us to designate as normal and good and right the very words and actions that are not representative of God at all. It happens to all of us. The Evil One wants us to be so busy calling each other names hoping to divide creation into us and them, citizen and immigrant, Republican and Democrat, pro-gun and anti-gun. And once we are divided the rest is easy. We are caught up in the work of demonizing each other and seeing our own brothers and sisters with the eyes of contempt. And Jesus says no. Love me and love each other. If we keep the Sabbath, we don’t get to overlook those lives being threatened daily.

Sabbath time is not optional for any of us. Sabbath time makes it possible for us to imagine the world differently, to imagine what we might truly believe is impossible - is possible, to imagine that we might be changed. As the disciples made their way with Jesus healing happened, the hungry were fed. It was the way of love. Again, I share the words of Bishop Curry:

“Think and imagine a world where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families when love is the way.  
 Imagine neighborhoods and communities when love is the way.  
 Imagine our governments and nations when love is the way.  
 Imagine business and commerce when love is the way.   
 Imagine this tired old world when love is the way.”

“When love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.  
 When love is the way, then no child would go to bed hungry in this world ever again.  
 When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.  
 When love is the way, poverty would become history.  
 When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.  
 When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields down by the riverside to study war no more.  
 When love is the way, there’s plenty good room.   Plenty good room.  For all of God’s children.

And when love is the way, we actually treat each other – well, like we’re actually family.  
 When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters.  Children of God.

My brothers and sisters, that’s a new heaven, a new earth, a new world.  
 A new human family.”

The Sabbath and the rest it brings is for us, but it is mostly for the sake of the world. It re-orients our life-styles to be life-giving rather than life-taking. Our opinions change, our behaviors change, our priorities change. I wish it was like a flu shot and getting it once a year was sufficient, but that’s not how it works. We need Sabbath rest, daily. It is God’s plan for us. It is God’s plan that heaven and earth become one and life will be holy for all.