

It's hard to preach. No need for sympathies. It is the truth.

Preaching is hard.

Sure, Jesus makes it look easy – but I'm not Jesus.

It's hard to connect these ancient scriptures, to everyday life.

Preaching is lonely.

Each week I wonder. Does anyone get anything out of this sermon? Does it really make a difference?

My preaching professor – Dr. Ridenhour – said that preaching was 'for that moment' If anyone remembered a single point Monday morning – that is a bonus.

That gives me a little relief... but still, preaching is risky business. Especially if no one cares.

And who really cares about the Sabbath?

We don't really care the third commandment. Christians have not observed the Sabbath -- that is, Friday evening through Saturday evening -- as a day of rest for thousands of years. And let's be honest...we have become comfortable with no longer even observing the Lord's Day, Sunday, as a "Christian Sabbath."

We are quite comfortable leaving worship to eat brunch with friends, stop by the pharmacy store to pick up some allergy medicine, mow the lawn, watch the football games, go to work. All of which is off limits according to Israel's rules.

We may not even observe the day at all, not even worry about church. So many other things fill the schedule – a full day of rest is ludicrous!

Maybe even an hour is as well.

And what do pastors do? We have to work on the Sabbath. Can Sabbath happen on another day? My friend Pastor John Trump – no relation to the president – said he likes to take little Sabbath breaks each day. That is nowhere in the bible. He is a heretic.

Sabbath is complicated. For us, for the disciples.

Today, and in the early church. For everyone.

Preaching Sabbath duty for Jesus wasn't easy. There were controversies and arguments. And let's not blame the Pharisees – who were trying to teach the right thing. They are not the villain. This was not a Jewish/Christian argument – just rabbi's with different interpretations.

The Pharisees were protecting Jesus' disciples.

Breaking Sabbath – innocent, minimal effort of plucking the grain, would be stealing from your neighbor – any other day of the week it was allowed.

The Pharisees focused on the duty to observe Sabbath rest. Jesus' focused on the duty to feed the hungry and heal the sick. Both honor God. Both reveal God's promise and presence. One is an old interpretation. One is new.

When Jesus comes into our narrative story of faith – our scriptures changes from Old Testament to New Testament. It isn't clear how we keep the Sabbath commandment in the light of the incarnation of Christ. Sabbath is kept, but changed – forever – because of Christ's presence on earth.

No longer does Sabbath fall under a strict timeline.  
Or in a certain place, and certain way.

In the gospel of Mark Jesus says – Sabbath is made for us, not us for the Sabbath.

Christ is Lord of the Sabbath, not the other way around.  
Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

More than that...Jesus is Sabbath.

Jesus is Sabbath rest, and Sabbath work. Our obedience (or disobedience!) to this commandment...doesn't change Jesus.

Instead, maybe Jesus changes our view of Sabbath...

We can admit – maybe we have to admit – that our communities are changing. Identities are changing.

Some change creates joy and hope; other change causes fear and pain. There church's identity and mission is in flux as denominations battle and split, congregations watch their numbers and resources dwindle. We hope for that new innovation, or the younger pastor to get younger families, or the magical program that turns things around.

But as people of the resurrection and renewal, we don't fight change...we embrace it, realizing that fabric of society, of church, isn't being ripped apart. It is being re-dyed, reformed. Church is changing. Sabbath is too.

The Women's March last weekend by many was defined as a crowd "praying together." It was a healing for the participants, they were nourished by the march, standing up for justice and change for others, and belief in the power of assembly. Those are the same reasons we come to this place at 9 am Sunday mornings. Prayer, Nourishment, Assembly, Change, Justice. Can that be called Sabbath?

Even in our "Sharing God's Story at Home" the service challenge this week is to take a true Sabbath day...enjoy your family and be in service to one another.

I scoffed at that notion...that isn't Sabbath at all! Get your family to church is Sabbath, not a day at home! But...then I am reminded...Jesus is Sabbath.

The duty of worship shouldn't worship us. Shouldn't control us. As important as Sunday worship is... we confess that worship happens outside of a single hour.

And it pains me to define it this way, because I want people in church. We have enough that draws us away from worship...I don't want to preach more incentive. This is why preaching is hard. The scriptures are opened to reveal God's changes, and it messes with our identity and the ways we have been taught.

I want a strict guideline, and consequences for breaking Sabbath, I want more law...less grace. But the gift of Sabbath...is that Jesus redefines our understanding.

Are we sinners for breaking Sabbath and not coming to church?  
Or is there a new way to look at it?

Sabbath can be honored anywhere.

**We are not bound by ancient law. We are bound by Jesus.**

It doesn't mean we can do whatever we want.

It means that the Lord of Sabbath defines us, and our lives.

As Jesus told the Pharisees, giving life is better than destroying life.

I believe that all bread becomes holy communion bread when we share it with others.

Loving God in church, and outside church; Loving your neighbor 24/7 – fulfills the commandments.

Loving self, resting, taking days away – to be reenergized by God – is Sabbath.

Honoring God by faithfully helping others and carrying out your work in insurance, CFO's, as grandparents, teachers, DOT, musicians – is also Sabbath.

So is stopping on the street to feed the hungry or help the stranded car – on your way to work.

We are gathered by God, rested and strengthened, forgiven and redeemed, fed by Christ and empowered by the Spirit to go - live the Sabbath – by living Jesus.

Sabbath is always changing, but our duty and our joy – is to live the love of the Lord that never changes.

That love makes preaching a bit easier.