

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“A Christian’s Labor Day”
Exodus 20:8-11
Matthew 11:25-30**

**Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 2, 2018**

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

"A Christian's Labor Day"

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Did you know that Labor Day has been an official holiday since 1894? Grover Cleveland was in his second round as President and the nation was being rocked by protests and strikes. Many of these strikes were in response to poor wages and work conditions in many of America's industrial factories. Labor Day came about because some folks argued for a specific holiday that workers could have off in addition to Christmas and Easter. This would be an opportunity for laborers to spend time with their families and enjoy summer activities. Today, Labor Day marks the unofficial end of summer break. By now, many schools, colleges, and universities are back in full swing. Because of this, there are many folks who take this weekend off to enjoy one last dip in the lake or one last walk along the beach.

Labor Day is a very good holiday for this nation to recognize, for more and more Americans are working more jobs and/or longer hours. Not only that, we can't seem to know how to slow down. Everything is move, move, move. And this happens for a variety of reasons. Our attention spans seem to be getting shorter. The cost of living seems to be getting more expensive. Even retirement isn't free from work. Work, school, sports, play, *church*; every moment of every day seems to be filled with something. When do we ever get the chance to relax? Labor Day was designed as a national opportunity to remember to take a breather. But you know what? This shouldn't be news to you. The Christian ought not be surprised when studies show that rest is good for a person. Of course rest is good, rest comes from God.

We all know the story of creation. For six days God labored creating this world, this universe, this time and space. From primordial nothingness to the height of creation, Adam and Eve, God formed it all. And after surveying his creation, declaring everything good, God rested on the seventh day. What a fantastic image! My mind's eye sees God laboring, toiling, hard at work for six days, constantly tweaking and tinkering, stitching together all of nature. I mean think about! There are thousands of species of animals, and millions of miles of terrain, and countless, unimaginable stars. I'm surprised God only took *one* day off. I often take a nap after working just a few hours on a Sunday morning. Preaching the Word is hard work enough, I can't imagine crafting it! But after all that creating, the only rest God needed was one day. I also like to imagine on that first Sabbath day, God and Adam relaxing in hammocks taking in the morning sun. They probably had a late and lengthy breakfast talking about the funny thing the rhinoceros did the other day. This was a time for God to enjoy his creation and for creation to enjoy him.

Sadly, as we all know the story, the bliss of that Eden quickly faded away. Genesis tells us that one day, after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, God was walking through the garden searching for his two friends. Perhaps Adam and Eve were deceived on a Friday night, and Saturday morning, the traditional Sabbath, rolled around, and part of God's routine for his Sabbath rest was spending the day with the man and his wife. But on this particular day, God could not find them. They were hidden. Sacred. They had forgotten what it meant to rest. Instead of resting in God, they ran from him.

To this day, we continue to run from God. The human race fails to remember to rest in him. We know this is the case, for why else would he establish the Fourth Commandment? *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord.* You see, the Fall didn't just affect our spiritual relationship with God, it changed everything! We can't even relate to work properly, because of sin. Without the Holy Spirit's guidance, each of us would either become a workaholic or indolent. We would either work ourselves to death or die from sheer laziness. Thus the need for the Fourth Commandment. We need reminding that rest is good. Rest is necessary. Rest is a command. But, like everything, rest needs to be properly ordered.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews has a wonderful exposition on rest. On several occasions, when talking about rest, he uses the Greek word *katapausis*. This word literally means to put down to rest. It's a physical type of pause. That rest is the type you take during a long hike or when working out. It's the type of rest our educators desire after a day of teaching. *Katapausis*: "I need to catch my breath." Then, suddenly, in 4:9, the Apostle switches words and introduces for the first and only time in the New Testament: *sabbatismos*. This is no mere pause. This is Sabbath rest. And Sabbath rest is the only Labor Day the Christian truly needs and truly longs for. This *sabbatismos* is a blessed rest, one that is modeled by God's rest. It, like the kingdom of God, is both here and not yet.

When we talk about Sabbath rest we are talking about two aspects of the same thing. The first is the blessed rest from all our toils and troubles that awaits the faithful in the age to come. This is

an eschatological rest, a rest that awaits us in the realm of glory. This is the truest form of rest, when God's children will spend eternity worshiping him and basking in his eternal love. But we also have a taste of that Sabbath here on earth. In the here and now, we are able and encouraged to seek after a rest that centers us on God. This is how earthly rest is properly ordered. If God is not at the center, then this rest, like everything else sin touches, becomes abominable to God.

For a rightly ordered rest, it must be directed toward God and impact our entire being. This rightly ordered rest is manifested in two aspects. There is an external rest, which is made explicit in the Fourth Commandment. This is a rest from our labors, our toils, our everyday work. We are encouraged to take a break from our labors so that we may focus our strength and our energy on God. He wants us to take vacations. In Sabbath rest, we take the time to set aside what grabs our attention during the week to turn and meet God. This external rest prescribed in the Fourth Commandment is exactly why we worship once a week. For six days we labor and work, but one in seven days is dedicated to God. Now, a whole lot can be discussed concerning the secular encroachments onto Sunday, but I'm going to save that for another day. For now, we must remember God's command to set aside a day for him and time for ourselves. Just as there is an external rest, there, too, is an internal rest. This rest moves us away from self-sufficiency to full reliance on God's grace. This is the type of rest that the soul does.

It's easy or easier for the body to rest. At some point we get so physically tired that we need to stop. But that point isn't as clear-cut when it comes to the soul. I know so many people, myself included, whose souls take on so much burden, yet little time for rest is made. The cares of others, the concerns of family, the day-to-day emotions, the need to put on a face, these and many other spiritual labors can wear away at the soul, just as manual labor wears away at the body. This is where the 21st century Christian has the hardest time of finding rest. Our minds and souls are endlessly bombarded by emotions, by information, by burdens. Our high-speed, global communication is great, but is also burdensome. It's hard for us to find the time to rest on God's grace. Yet, that's exactly what the Apostle tells us we need to do. Hebrews 4:11 says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest."

Thankfully, this is not an impossible task. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells his disciples, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,* and you will find rest for your souls." A Christian's Labor Day is only possible through Jesus Christ. This true and perfect Sabbath only comes when we take Christ's yoke and learn from him. That's the definition of union with Christ. His yoke is his commands. The teachings of Christ are our guides for everyday living and the worldview with which we must see. When we truly clothe ourselves with the light of Christ, we can enter into a Sabbath rest that touches both the body and the soul. Otherwise, the rest we seek is vanity. Without Christ, any rest we think we attain is tainted by sin and does not rejuvenate us. Rest, without Christ, is mere *katapausis*—an unfulfilling pause. *Sabbatismos*, Sabbath rest, is true and powerful and only comes through Jesus Christ. Today, as we celebrate our Lord's Supper, our earthly Communion with Christ, I invite you to place your burdens on the Lord. As we share in his bread of life and his cup of salvation, I invite you to consider what it means to

take his yoke, to be guided by his commands. And consider the true and blessed rest that awaits those who are united with the him.

Let us pray. Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, you formed this world from nothing and afterward you rested. In a perfect world we would rest with you and in you. Instead, sin's perversion moves us away from truly blessed rest. We ask that the Holy Spirit guide us back to your Sabbath rest. We long for the peace that only Christ can give, a peace that passes all understanding. May this *sabbatismos* renew our bodies and our souls so that we may be better, more zealous disciples of our Lord. And may we be ever mindful of the eternal rest that awaits us in heavenly bliss. Until that day, keep us on the path of righteousness for the glory of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.