

The Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 3, 2018, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 2:23-28

***"Lord of the Sabbath"***

You might be wondering 'that's a different kind of stole that Fr. John is wearing today.' Well, it is a stole that was made for me by a dear friend when I was in the International Diocese, when I was in the 'great white north' – Buffalo. This is a symbol for Jewish Believers and believers who are Christians, that believe that we are children of Abraham. So, let me explain it to you, and it is especially timely because of today's Gospel.



If you know what a menorah is – it is the 'candelabra' that was in the Temple. There are two different types of menorahs – there is the menorah for Chanukah which has eight candles, for the eight days, and then there is the seven, which is the normal and is used for the Shabbat or Sabbath, which we will be talking about today. It then goes down into the 'Star of David' - and you notice they are connected. You have the 'Law of Moses' connected to the Davidic king. Look what happens after that – it goes down to the ICHTHUS. How many people have an ICHTHUS on their car?



Ιησους (Yesus)(Jesus)  
Χριστος (Cristos) (Christ)  
Θεου (Thayou) (God)  
Υιου (Hweeoo) (Son of)  
Σωτηρ (Sewtear) (the living)

It is the Greek word for fish – an anagram where the first letter means something:

**I X Θ Υ Σ**  
**Jesus Christ God's Son Savior**

What you have here is Judaism connected to the Davidic King, connected to Christianity, and so Jewish Believers – or Messianic Jews love this, and Christians love this because we are 'grafted in' – Romans 11:17. I wanted to explain this stole and symbol to you. I have a keychain in my pocket with that symbol on it – and I use it a lot.

When early Christians, followers of the way, as they were known before being named Christians, and they wanted to talk to someone about Jesus but were not sure – they would draw part of the symbol of the fish in the ground and if the other person finished the symbol – they knew it was OK to talk. It is OK for us to talk today because we are all followers of the way!

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In today's Gospel, we have Jesus confusing some of the people who are not followers of the way. I want to define for you the word 'Sabbath.' According to Dictionary.com, the word Sabbath is "defined as the seventh day of the week, Saturday, as the day of rest and religious observance among Jews and some Christians. The first day of the week, Sunday, is similarly observed by most Christians in commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ. It also is any special day of prayer or rest resembling the Sabbath. The Hebrew word Shabbat is the day of rest commanded by God." It is important for us to remember that God commanded the Shabbat for mankind – not for Himself. He gave us an example when He created the world and then rested on the seventh day, but God doesn't need to 'recharge His batteries' but He sure knows that we do! Is there anyone who doesn't need a day off now and again? When God talks about rest He is not saying "Shut yourself off in your room, and don't see or talk to anybody." In other words – don't work – do things you enjoy doing.

When God gave Moses the Law – the 10 Commandments in Exodus chapter 20, and again which we heard this morning is Deuteronomy chapter 5: "*Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*" (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

The Jewish people, especially the legalists who want to do everything to the "nth" degree, they want to dot the "I's" and cross the "T's" – for every little thing and carry it out -they take this very seriously, especially the more orthodox ones. Both times that we visited Israel on Shabbat (Friday night through sundown Saturday) in the hotel there is a specific elevator marked "Shabbat Elevator" on which every floor button is lit – because they consider pushing the buttons as work. You have the option to take a regular elevator and push the button for your floor. For those that observe they have the Shabbat elevator, and they are all lit. This means you don't have to exert effort or the "work" of pushing a button. This might seem trivial to some but to others this is the type of legalistic attitude that Jesus meets 'head on' in today's Gospel as His disciples are picking some heads of grain. God gave mankind the outline of what the Sabbath should be, but the people added to it, like the elevator buttons and things like that; and how far you could walk on the Sabbath day. They didn't have cars or pickup trucks to jump into. It was outlined for by them what they could or could not do – all done for the people by the people – the priests and the teachers of the Law. The Pharisees who were always trying to trap Jesus. Listen to this: "*The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*" (Mark 2:24) This event is also recorded in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 12 and Luke chapter 6. Jesus and His disciples were walking to the synagogue – not walking for pleasure or even health – but heading to worship God. They were hungry. Here the

Pharisees who were traveling with Jesus to try and trap Him and His followers with the slightest misstep – were ready to pounce – and they did with that question.

Jesus' reply to them is a bit of a tease, but it sure packs a strong punch. He doesn't deny that the disciples are out of line with the traditional Sabbath observance, but Jesus speaks of previous circumstances and a scriptural precedent. Jesus said to them, "*Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God (the Temple) and ate the consecrated bread (the show bread), which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.*" (Mark 2:25-26)

Here, Jesus puts himself on a par with King David, in a time when David, who had already been anointed by Samuel but was not yet on the throne, because Saul was still alive and king. David was on the run from Saul, trying to get support, and waiting for his time to take his throne. When you think about it – Jesus' words must have taken the Pharisees by surprise, with the implication of Jesus saying that He is the true king, anointed by God but He was not yet recognized and on His throne. Another interesting thing is that Jesus pointed to Abiathar as the High Priest – but history tells us that when David came to get the bread – Abiathar was not yet the High Priest – but his father Abimelech was the High Priest. Another example of someone waiting to assume his special place. Jesus was a master at using parallels to point to Himself.

When Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, God the Father said at that time, as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove: "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" (Mark 1:11) Jesus was implying that He therefore, like David, has the right, when He and his people are hungry, to by-pass the normal regulations – the man-made regulations. In other words, this kind of Sabbath-breaking, was a deliberate sign, like the refusal to fast: a sign that the King is here, that the kingdom is here. The new creation is already making itself know in the old world!

All of this came to a summation, which probably puzzled those hearing Jesus speak, as much as it does to many people today. As Jesus made these parallels; made these examples, there were people who understood right away, because they had ears to hear. And they had the ability to understand while there were others who were puzzled, because they were not called as of yet. It is a combined comment about the Sabbath and about Jesus' own authority. This is the second time of thirteen times that Jesus refers to 'the Son of man' in Mark; reinforcing Him as the Messianic figure which first-century Jews discovered in Daniel 7, whose arrival and enthronement signals the start of God's kingdom. Jesus doesn't mean that just any human being is '*Lord of the sabbath*', but that it is the Messiah, the true anointed One, who has authority over institutions that might otherwise repress humans. Jesus' action, and its explanation, were more than just a coded messianic claim, and that in Him the new day was dawning in which even Israel's God-given laws would be seen in a new light.

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You might remember in the Gospel when the Pharisees asked Jesus why the Apostles were eating without washing their hands and Jesus said, "*It is not what goes into a man's mouth that makes him unclean, but that come out.*" (Matthew 15:11) When I was growing up in the 50's and 60's – everything was closed on Sunday, except for maybe one gas station in town. When the "blue laws" were slowly evaporating – suddenly more and more places succumbed to the pressure until it was the rare business that was closed on the Sabbath. I cannot tell you how absolutely refreshing it was when we first visited Douglas in July of 2014 – and found most everything was closed on Sunday – and many places remain that way today. The term 'day of rest' was seriously meant to be followed.

Jesus' saying that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath, suggests that when the well-being of man conflicts with the observance of the Sabbath, the Sabbath has to give way. But mankind is not to judge, because we cannot judge with impartiality our own interests. It is not about profits. No one is capable of judging all that affects the well-being of mankind, and only the Lord knows this. And for this reason, Jesus adds, "*So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*" I believe this means that as the Son of man came to provide for mankind's welfare, and as the Sabbath law might need to be modified for the highest good of humanity, therefore lordship over the Sabbath was given to the Son of man.

This Gospel message teaches, then, not that men might violate the law of the Sabbath when their welfare demanded it, but that Jesus, as the Lord, as the Messiah, could set it aside, when His own judgment of mankind's well-being required Him to. Jesus made it clear on this occasion that this law was not to be interpreted as to prevent mankind from providing necessary food on the Sabbath-day.

When Jesus said He was Lord of the Sabbath, He said as Lord, He was greater than the law and above the law. To the Pharisees, this was absolute heresy, one of the things they were looking for. This was one of the things they wanted to 'nail Him' for – and boy, didn't they! It must have been driving them nuts. They did not realize that Jesus, the divine, only Son of God, had created the Sabbath in the first place. The Creator is always greater than the creation; and because of this - Jesus had the authority to overrule their traditions and regulations. He told Moses that when He gave him this commandment "*For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*" (Exodus 20:11) Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah is the Lord of the Sabbath – and He made it – and so we should keep it holy as well.

In Israel people are greeted on the Sabbath with "Shabbat Shalom." Shalom meaning 'peace.' And so on this Sabbath day – I greet you with "Shabbat Shalom."