

## **“Thank God It’s...Friday? Saturday? Sunday?”**

### **Sermon – June 2, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church**

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T-G-I-F—Thank God It’s Friday! First appearing in print in 1904 and first as an acronym in 1941, it became increasingly popular starting in the 1970s, perhaps because of the restaurant chain started in the 1960s, TGI Fridays.

TGIF expresses gratification that the working week is nearly over, and a weekend of leisure will soon be here. Interesting, the very concept of a “weekend” is fairly modern practice. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century most people worked six days a week, getting Sundays off. They probably said, “Thank God it’s Saturday!”

In 1926 Henry Ford introduced 40-hour work weeks with five working days with no cut in wages after discovering that six-day weeks yielded only a small increase in productivity that lasted a short period. This discovery inspired other manufacturing companies to adopt the 40-hour work week, which became the norm.

Part of Ford’s motivation was also that with more time, and the higher wages he was paying them, his workers would spend more money, particularly on the automobiles they were building. And he was right.

Thus, the “weekend” came into its own. In fact, it became the thing many people started to live for. They endured five days of work to enjoy two days of leisure. Now we even have “I can’t believe it’s Monday!” and Wednesday as the middle of the week is now “hump day”. It’s not clear that we appear to be more unhappy because the quality of work life is less than our forebearers or because we have a taste of leisure and want more.

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Most cultures and religions have a weekly time for rest. In Judaism it was (and is) the Sabbath, which is thought to be related to the Hebrew word for “rest.”

Exodus 20 is the familiar list of the Ten Commandments (or more accurately the Ten Sayings) that we heard last October. #3 (if you are Protestant or Jewish; #4 if you are Catholic or Lutheran) starts in verse 8 saying, “Remember the Sabbath day and 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; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.”

And hearkening back to the creation story in Genesis that the commandment alludes to, we remember that it said after each day of creation, “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” and second and third and so forth.

Thus, by mentioning evening before morning, the Torah defined a day as beginning with the evening, followed by the morning. Hence, for the Jews the Sabbath (or Shabbot in Hebrew) starts on our Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening.

In contrast to the Exodus version, today’s First Testament passage is from the version of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5.

Structurally, there is little difference between the two, but instruction on the Sabbath differs subtly but crucially.

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As you heard earlier, Deuteronomy 5:12 starts with “Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.” Note that we have gone from “Remember” to “Observe”. From something that could have been casual passive behavior to a disciplined active behavior.

More importantly, the reason for the Sabbath is significantly different.

Deuteronomy 5:15 says, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.”

Here, the Sabbath is because of God’s redemptive act on Israel’s behalf during the Exodus experience rather than because God rested on the seventh day. The people are to keep the Sabbath in remembrance of their enslavement in Egypt.

The command to honor the Sabbath reminds them of their liberation experience, urging them to maintain a just relationship with each other and God. By subtly altering the command’s language, Deuteronomy highlights its social justice aspects, advocating for the marginalized and breaking oppressive ideologies. The Sabbath and a day of rest is not just for rich and powerful.

In Deuteronomy, the distribution of work and rest is not established according to social and economic status but according to time. Those at the top of the household hierarchy and those who depend on this person—including the animals and the strangers in town—are protected by divine command and may enjoy a time to work and rest.

The Sabbath is more than a ritual; it symbolizes deliverance and a tangible expression of liberation for the laboring populace and animals. It

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dismantles the retribution theology, offering rest not based on merit but as divine grace and blessing.

The invitation to celebrate this day and to regard it as different from the workdays makes it holy.

Thus, the Sabbath is very important. Exodus 31:14 says, “everyone who profanes it shall be put to death.” And indeed, in Numbers 15:32-36 a man is found gathering sticks on the Sabbath and God said to stone him to death. And they did.

So when the Pharisees get on Jesus’ case in today’s gospel lesson from Mark 2 about his disciples “working” on the Sabbath, they had good precedent.

The tricky part is deciding what honors God. The more you study the bible—both First and Second Testaments—the more you see this swinging back and forth from inclusivity and openness, which can be seen as “anything goes” to exclusivity and strict rule following, which can be seen as self-righteous.

Jesus perceives that the pendulum has swung too far to the latter. For Jesus the satisfaction of human need trumps reverent religiosity every time.

In today’s passage he contends that sometimes certain demands of the law are rightly set aside in favor of pursuing greater values or meeting greater needs, especially when those greater needs promote a person’s well-being and facilitate the arrival of divine blessings.

The proper function of the sabbath is to promote life and extol God as a liberator. The Pharisees would have agreed with that, but they were irritated by this guy from a backwater town implicitly criticizing their interpretation when they prided themselves are being more scrupulous about following the Torah than anyone else, including the priests.

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You can see the way in which disagreement about living within the law quickly escalated into hostility. It also illustrates how religious commitments and values -- any religious commitments and values -- can ossify and turn oppressive in the hands of careless stewards. None is immune. Including us.

How many truly rest on our Sabbath or promote actions that allow others, particularly those on the margins, to do the same?

How many of us would be irritated if things weren’t open on Sunday?

Because Jesus rose on the first day of the week, over time Christians starting their “sabbath” on Sunday and—becoming more Gentile-based—followed the Roman reckoning of days from midnight to midnight. And so for them it became, “Thank God it’s Sunday!”

But the point of the Sabbath is to honor God by resting to renew ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. And not just for ourselves as individuals but for all people.

This story, as does Mark’s gospel in general, demonstrates the in-breaking reign of God, which is a story of compassion and transformation. And God saw that it was good.

So as followers of Christ, as you make your way through the week, you can say, “Thank God it’s...”, well, just thank God.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer,  
Amen.