

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<sup>12</sup> “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Fellow Worshipers of our Gracious God,**

When I was growing up, my family attended worship services every week and midweek services and special Festival services. The general rule in our family was that you didn’t miss a worship service unless you were deathly sick. You know what I learned from this – church is important and you better not miss it.

While my motivation might have been a little mixed up, having church as a high priority in life did have a far reaching impact on my life. When I joined the military, I continued to worship every week. It wasn’t always so easy. For the nine months I was stationed in 29 Palms, CA that meant driving 90 miles each way to attend church. Someone once asked me why I did that – why did I drive 90 miles to go to church – and my answer was because that was how I was brought up – my parents had instilled that habit into my life. It was important to me.

But that’s not the only reason I made sure I attended worship services every week. I attended because it was something I needed – I needed to hear God’s Word to recharge me and to prepare me for the next week. I needed to be with fellow Christians who believed what I believed. This morning as we consider our sermon text, I hope you will be able to see how important worship is for your lives too – how it is good to be together with your fellow Christians and how worship can bring you rest and recharge you for the coming week.

**I.** Our sermon text is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time Moses presented the 10 Commandments to the people. The 1<sup>st</sup> time was just after the people left Egypt, at the foot of Mount Sinai, but now it is 40 years later and they are getting ready to enter the Promised Land. Our sermon text are the words of the Third Commandment. What comes to mind when you hear this commandment? When I hear the phrase, “Sabbath Day” the first thing that comes to mind is the Old Testament people of Israel bringing sacrifices to the temple. I think of all the worship laws that surrounded their lives and about how all their activity ceased at sundown Friday night and how Saturday was a special day.

If I were to ask you what the Sabbath Day is all about, I am guessing most of you would answer it with one word – worship. But God’s Old Testament people would probably tell you something different.

You see the word “Sabbath” means rest. And they would say the Sabbath Day is all about rest – spiritual rest and physical rest. After all, the Sabbath Day laws said, **“For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death.”** (Exodus 35:2). Did you notice the penalty for working on the Sabbath? It was death. God was pretty serious about this commandment as with any of the commandments, but why such an emphasis on “rest?”

Have you ever worked 10 or 12 days straight? It’s not easy and you can’t wait for that day off. Even after working 40 hours a week, we look forward to our time off. God knows that we need that physical and mental rest from our work. That’s why, right at the beginning of the world, when everything was perfect, he set the pattern that every week we should set aside time for rest.

When I was growing up, all the businesses and stores were closed on Sunday. Even the gas stations. That’s because Sunday was a day of rest and relaxation. Sunday was a time to spend with family and friends. And not only a day for physical rest but also a day for spiritual rest.

The town I grew up in had 4 large Lutheran churches, a Baptist church, 2 big Catholic churches and a few other Christian churches. On Sunday mornings those churches were all filled and the streets were empty. People were in church finding refreshment for their souls – being filled and renewed by the Word.

So how have things changed? Certainly, our needs haven’t changed. I’m like you. I get tired and need a day to rest – to rest physically. But I’m also like you and like my parents and grandparents and all those who have gone before me in that I sin daily. That wears me down too and like you, I have to deal with sinners every day and sometimes I suffer as the result of someone else’s sins and that wears me down too. And I know it is the same for many of you. Physically we may be different but spiritually we are the same. Sin wears us all down.

The worship lives of God’s Old Testament people revolved around the temple and the various sacrifices and offerings they had to bring. When Jesus came into this world he didn’t ignore those laws, but rather kept everyone of them perfectly. He didn’t bring sin offerings to the temple because he didn’t sin, but he was the perfect sin offering for our sins.

Paul in his letter to the Colossians tells us, **“<sup>13</sup> God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.... <sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.** (Colossians 3:13-17). We are no longer bound by the written code of the Old Testament but have been freed from our sins by the salvation found through faith in Jesus Christ. Doesn’t that bring you a little relief and a little joy? My guilt is gone and so is yours. We have been forgiven and we are free to forgive those around us because Christ has paid for our sins. God has forgiven me – picked me up and headed me into a new week renewed and refreshed.

In the past, Dawn and I have attended the National Worship conference put on by our Synod. At those conferences, we usually attend 7 or 8 worship services in 4 days. Some people might think it strange that we went to church so many times in such a short period of time but at each service the Holy Spirit filled us with the Word, brought us the promises of God's Word and gave us an opportunity to praise and thank God with a 1000 other Christians and it's hard to describe the joy we felt and how each service refreshed us spiritually.

We will never have 1000 people in our church, but we have the very same Word to refresh us. To lift us up. To remind us that we are not all alone as we journey through life because we are one of God's Children. We gather together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage one another and to praise our gracious God. Jesus said, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”**(Matthew 11:28-29). He wants us to find rest for our souls in him and he has promised, **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** (Matthew 18:20).

Jesus is here to lift you up today – right here and right now. That is the promise he brings to us through his Word. He is here to bring us forgiveness for our sins. That is the promise we have in his Word. He is here to bring us comfort. That is his promise in his Word. He is here to bring us strength. That is his promise in his Word. The writer to the Hebrews said, **“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup>Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.** (Hebrews 4:2, 9-11)

The influences of the world want to spoil the rest that God has reserved for us. Satan will use any tactic to keep us from God's Word. But that takes away the precious rest we all need – rest for our bodies as well as rest for our souls.

My parents weren't perfect but I am thankful that they showed me how important it was to hear God's Word on a regular basis. For many of you this is also a regular habit, but if it isn't I hope and pray that you will consider the spiritual rest that is yours when you are filled with the Word and will return to receive God's blessing of renewal every week. May our attitude towards worship then be the same as the psalmist who wrote, **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.”** (Psalm 122:1). Amen.