

Mark 2:23-28

Pentecost 2; June 6, 2021

How many of you here today are on some kind of platform of Social Media? How many of you are on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snap-chat, and other platforms as well? (show hands) If you are, then you might understand what the term “following” means. If you aren’t, the answer is pretty much like what it sounds like. In social media a *follower* means a user who chooses or desires to see all of another person’s posts so that they can *follow* them. That might be a person. It might be a business. It might be a news station.

Whether you are on social media or not, someone might ask the question: “*Why?*” The answer is not as difficult as you might think. Social media come down to one simple basic human desire: the need to connect with other human beings. We want to be part of a group. Technology and the Internet have made it so we can connect with anyone, anywhere, anytime. We know more about each other than we ever did before.

It used to be that in order to be part of a group, you needed to be physically present with that group to be part of it. With social media we can connect with many people who we share beliefs with, who like to do the things that we do, with people who have similar hobbies that we do. We can follow all kinds of people all from the comfort of our couch. In fact, people can follow us here at St. Paul’s. We want people to do that because now we get to show them what is going on here at St. Paul’s. They can check out our school, our church, what we believe, how we worship all from the comfort of their home or wherever they are.

Over the next six weeks, we are not planning to *follow* a celebrity social media account or some business. But we are going to *follow* Jesus as we take a look at a portion of the Gospel of Mark. We will see that Jesus gives his followers true rest. Our God points us to his powerful Word and invites us to gather around it and grow. Jesus gives his followers so much more than an encouraging motivational speech. He is actually with his followers, leading us through and protecting us from the storms of life and comforting us when we encounter rejection or even death. So, let’s begin to *follow* Jesus and see the rest that Jesus wants to give us.

Let’s go back to the beginning of the story – all the way back to the Garden of Eden. In six days, God created this entire world. In the book of Genesis, Moses tells us that: **“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”** Have you ever asked yourself the question: “*Why?*” God doesn’t get tired. Why did he need a day of rest? He didn’t.

God had a completely different reason for giving the people of this world a Sabbath (“rest”) Day. God intended a day of rest to be a blessing for his people. In our Gospel lesson for today that’s what Jesus means when he says: **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** God wanted to bless his people. Yet, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had taken a blessing and turned it into a work. They made it something that God never intended it to be. Why would you take a command that was meant to be a blessing and turn it into something that it was not? Perhaps, there was some reasoning behind all the rules that they insisted to be followed. I think there is more there than just simply being a power or control thing.

Let me explain what I mean? The Pharisees knew the history of the Old Testament. They understood the old covenant (promise) that God had given his people. It pretty much boiled down to this: *Follow the commands of God and you will be blessed by God. If you don’t, you won’t.* If you look back at the history of the children of Israel, it was pretty easy to see. When they followed God’s will, he blessed them. When they didn’t follow the rules, they God themselves into trouble. They repeated this pattern over and over again. Therefore, it is pretty easy to see that if you follow the rules, then you will be blessed by God. Logically, that makes sense doesn’t it?

But what happens, when you take something that was meant to be a blessing and turn it into something that it wasn’t? What happens when you the gift of Sabbath rest and turn it into a work? You get *legalism*. Legalism means that *you make a rule where God has not made a rule and demand that others follow that rule as well.* We see an example of that in our text. So, where does this rule for not harvesting grain on the Sabbath come from?

It comes from our first reading. God wanted to bless his people with a day of rest. So, he didn't want his people to focus all of their time and energy into work. He didn't want them to work with no break. He also wanted to bless his people by giving them time to focus on his promises for them. He never meant that a few handfuls of grain to be defined as working, harvesting. That was not the purpose of the law. The purpose of the law was not to put people on a guilt trip. Yes, the law is there so that we see how little that we can keep. But it is there to also bless us. It's there to point us to Jesus who has kept it perfectly for us. God wants to bless his people.

So, Jesus gives an example that they would all be familiar with. **“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 and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”** Saul was the king of Israel. David had become a leader in Saul's army. But when David started to get more popular than Saul, things changed. Saul wanted to see David dead. So, David was forced to run for his life. On this occasion in our text, David and his small group of men with him had no food. So, David asks the high priest, Abiathar, if he had some food to give him. The only food that he had was the loafs of bread that were in the tabernacle that were set aside for priests. God had made the rule that it was not meant for anyone else. So, the high priest took the bread and gave it to David and his men, and nowhere in the Bible is David or the high priest condemned for not keeping the law that the bread was meant only for the priests. The purpose of the law was to give the Israelites to show their love to God. It wasn't meant to just be a manual of rules.

Think of how Jesus summarized the law when he said that we are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. The purpose of the Sabbath law was to point the children of Israel to Jesus and the true rest he brings. God wanted to bless his people with the promise of rest. God wants to do the same to you. He doesn't want you to come here and spend some time with him because someone put a guilt a trip on you. He wants to give you the blessing of rest.

He wants you to enjoy that blessing of rest. He wants you to know that your sins are forgiven. You are his child. As followers of Jesus, he wants to bless us so much. We listen to his word and hear words of rest and comfort. He wants us to know that we are part of his group. May God help all of to follow him and enjoy the Sabbath rest he gives us. Amen.