

## **Sermon for June 10, 2018 – “Keepin’ It Holy”**

OT10, Year B – Texts: Nehemiah 8:1-10; Luke 4:14-21

**Rev. Jeff Colarossi, Westwood First Presbyterian Church**

There’s an old story about a couple that was walking out of church one Sunday. The wife asked the husband, “Did you see the strange hat Mrs. O’Brien was wearing?” “No, I didn’t,” replied the husband. “Bill Smith badly needs a haircut, doesn’t he?” commented the wife. “Sorry, but I didn’t notice,” her husband said. “You know, John,” said the wife impatiently “Sometimes I wonder if you get anything at all out of going to church.” People get different things out of going to church depending, it would seem, on what they expect to get when they go there.

Today's Gospel reading begins by telling us that when Jesus returned to Galilee, to Nazareth His home town, on the Sabbath He went to the synagogue as was His custom. “...as was His custom.” Hmm, what an interesting statement. He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was his custom. Jesus grew up attending the synagogue in His home town. It was His habit, His practice, His custom, to worship there on the Sabbath day. And here He is, after His baptism/anointing with the Spirit having already having demonstrated who He is proving His connectedness to God. Here He is, attending weekly worship in the synagogue. The question is: Why? I ask because lots of people who claim to be connected to God, lots of people who claim to be spiritual but don’t attend public worship on a regular basis but stay home to watch some TV preacher instead. I ask because there are many who claim that they can be “good Christians” without ever stepping foot in church on Sunday morning. Interesting! I say interesting because here we have Jesus, the son of God, the holiest person this world has ever seen, a person who had the deepest kind of prayer life and a profound intimacy with the creation so much so that He could command storms to cease, here we see that He attended public worship and did so on a regular basis. What did He expect to find there in that experience? I mean, wouldn’t He have known it all already? Surely, the prayers of the cantor, the psalms that were sung, the scriptures that were read, and the message for that day were old hat to Him. Surely, He could have spent the time better on the mountainsides walking and praying. Surely, He could’ve done better simply resting His tired body after a hard week of being about His Father’s business, and yet here He is! Why?

I think there are several reasons but the most important (and basic) reason is because it’s part of what it means to “keep” the Sabbath to keep it “holy.” If that sounds familiar (and it should) it’s because it’s one of the Ten Commandments! Anyone remember which one? (Hint: It’s the one that comes after three and just before five.)

**“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.**

To consecrate something (or, make something holy) is to set it apart and dedicate it to God. Now we know Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. We get that – right? But I think there’s more here because this is about more than simple obedience.

Which brings us to the second thing our reading teaches us and I believe it's this, that Jesus went to the synagogue to hear the Word of God, to be reminded of the Word of God, and to be recreated by the Word of God even though He was the Word of God made flesh! Jesus tells us that we should listen to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees even when their personal lives, their holiness, their way of doing things are less than perfect. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples:

**“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.**

**“So, you must obey them and do everything they tell you.**

**“But do not do what they do; for they do not practice what they preach.**

Jesus was and is the Word made flesh. But as flesh, Jesus needed, as much as you and I need, the systematic and regular reminder of what the Word tells us.

Which brings us to the third thing...It feeds us. I heard a story the other day about a man who told a friend that he no longer saw any point in going to church that he'd heard over a thousand sermons over the previous years and couldn't remember what any of them said. His friend replied that over the same period he'd eaten thousands of meals that had been prepared by his wife and couldn't remember a single one of them but that wasn't about to stop him from going home for supper. God has prepared a meal for us within the setting of the church family He's given to us. Jesus reminded the devil when He was being tempted in the wilderness that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Those words are read each week in worship. Our first reading this morning describes one such occasion. Actually, a special occasion. An occasion when the Hebrew Scriptures were read for the first time after many years of exile. It was read aloud to the people and explained as it was read. The children of Israel wept aloud when they heard it. They wept because they realized how far from God they'd drifted, how much they'd lost, how much they could've had. The Word convicted them showing how very lost they'd been. The Word has done that a time or two for me and I'd imagine for many of you as well. If it hasn't – it should. If it has – good because we all need to be reminded of what's true and what isn't. Of what leads to life and what leads to death. Now, if the story of God's Word being read and proclaimed to the Israelites that day ended there that would've been fine. But it didn't end there! You see, Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the scribe and the Levites told the people that “this day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep...” “...go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” I'm guessing that God's Word in that sacred assembly most certainly convicted the people as they heard it that day. But, it was also seen as a blessing. I'm hoping that the same is true of us, each time we gather. That's the very nature of God's Word. It can convict us and yet in the very next verse, sometimes in the **same** verse, gives us the promise of God! It feeds us. It feeds us with what we need to live, even when it doesn't always seem to be the case.

Here's a question. How much attention do we pay to the emergency instructions given by the flight attendants just prior to takeoff? There's a story about a business man who flew on a regular basis. This guy had tons of frequent flier miles and knows the emergency instructions by heart. So, he's on a flight and just prior to landing the pilot interrupted the routine telling the passengers that they had landing gear trouble. The man looked out at the approaching airport to see the fire engines assembled alongside the runway. They had to circle, dump fuel and listen to emergency procedures **again!** But this time, the man paid **very** close attention. The man said, “we listened as if our lives depended on our getting them right – because they did!” Anyone want to guess where I'm going with this? I hope so, because here's the thing...The people of Israel in our first reading, and Jesus in the gospel reading, call us today to pay attention to the God who speaks to us. Each week, we hear God's Word. Do we listen as if our lives depend on it? We should – because they do! (By the way, the plane arrived safely.)

But there's even more here...Because as it was on the day that Jesus went to the synagogue and read from the prophet Isaiah the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing this day as well. Christ is here – here in this place on this **our** Sabbath Day! Here to bring good news! Here to proclaim freedom! Here to bring sight! You came today – as is the custom of many (if not all) of you. I thank God for that.

Amen and amen.