



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 21, 2017

Sabbath (Cease) to Serve

John 14:15-31

Peace to you on this Lord's Day. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts and guide us again to walk in the ways of the Lord. Amen!

One of my mentors once said, "Life in Christ must be grounded in two of the Ten Commandments. Can you guess which they were?"

- ✠ The First --- "You shall have no other Gods."
- ✠ The Third – "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Makes sense with one God and one day a week to "Cease," the literal meaning of "Sabbath." Seems so basic, but so often lost in every time in human history.

The 21st Century challenge is how to be a faithful Christians in a world which seems so complicated. So many temptations, demands on time, calls for loyalty, to meet everyone's expectations in which one writer, Tom Friedman, calls the "Age of Acceleration" where the gods of culture call for attention and time is driven by immediate attention to nearly every aspect of human social communication. And the most recent diagnostic label---F.O.M.O, "Fear of Missing Out"--- which tempts us every moment NOT to cease or to recall our calling as those who know the need for "Sabbath Rest," to CEASE.

How must it have been for those first disciples? Their "breaking news" was that Jesus had been raised and would meet them in Galilee. They heard, they went, they saw and their lives were made new forever.

How must it have been for those next generation Christians some 60 years after those who had seen Jesus were dead and with God forever? Those who were merely "ear witnesses". Yet, those who placed their confidence in the message that their calling was as good as those to whom Jesus first said, "Follow Me."

Saul/Paul may be a good mentor to each of us, centuries later, who seek to be faithful in mission through the empowering Holy Spirit in whom we gather this Lord's Day to be encouraged, equipped and sent to be faithful witness to the God we know in Jesus Christ.

Let's look at it, Case Study: Paul in Athens:

- † He had traveled some 1500 miles in his first travels from Antioch, through Cyprus and into Asia Minor.
- † Now, in the second missionary journey, have responded to the call to come to Macedonia, he brought the Gospel to Europe (Philippi to Thessalonica) and arrived in Athens.
- † Athens had been the intellectual center of Western Civilization, now a city of 5000, respected within the Roman Empire living on its great past.
- † Waiting for his co-workers to arrive in Athens, he taught in the synagogues, but was "enraged" that the city was full of idols. ("A junkyard of idols," The Message has it!) New religions centered in Athens as each new one found a place by buying land and building a temple/idol center for worship.
- † Perhaps, like a typical tourist, he also began to teach in the market place, the agora, and began to gather active listeners and philosophers (Stoics and Epicureans) who began to talk with him.
- † There was both the pro and the con, a little like Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, London.
- † Some said, "You are babblers. Others show interest in this new religion and invited him up on the Acropolis (on Mars Hill) for a time of dialogue. "For we are intrigued, tell us more about this new religion." Luke adds that in Athens people just waited around for gossip and some new tidbit to chat up!

Now don't miss that Paul knew the neighborhood, the context in which people lived, he "got" the culture. So, Paul assumes the role of an orator, deep into the best of rhetoric and teaches like a "new-Socrates."

Identifies with his hearers, makes some observations, not afraid to launch his witness, "ready to make defense to anyone who demands an accounting for the hope that is in you." He may not have done it with gentleness, but surely with reverence.

Notes they are very religious, walked around and even found an altar "to the unknown god." Covering all bases, it would seem! Then, he becomes creedal...this is what "I/we believe."

- † He begins with God. They know god/a god, even one unknown, but he introduced a God, the God of all creation. A God not made of human hands or captive in stone, but "Creator of the world, Lord of heaven and earth." How big is your God? You don't create God, God created you and made every nation from one people. Nearly the confession of the First Article of the Creed. God seeks us and this God is not far off. This God is the God in who we live and move and are...even Greek poets say that, Paul says to them.
- † Time for true knowledge. And he shares the essence of the Second Article of the Creed: "All are commanded to repent, the unknown is now known, and he's calling for a radical life-change. He has set a day when the entire human race will be judged and everything set right. And he has already appointed the judge, confirming him before everyone by raising him from the dead."
- † Witness made...some laughed, walked off joking; others said that they would come another day to hear more. BUT, by the power of the Holy Spirit, some were convinced and stuck with Paul. Newborn in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, to become witness to would learn be One with God, in Jesus, who would keep Lord's Day, hang together growing in discipleship, in love and peace, bring hope with joy to the world in mission.

There are, yes, three points upon which to find our focus in Christ on this day of blessing in which we believe, teach, and confess that---

Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

!) In mission, we are called, you and I. Measured not by what we want, but where God wants us to be. Growing in discipleship, discipleFit in body, mind and soul. It all begins with the Cross and our each day confession that "Jesus is my Lord, my Savior. The One who unites us to be the people of God." This Jesus knows and is from God, knows us, saves us, and empowers us to learn the ways of witness and love for one another and the world.

!!) In mission, we are called to know the neighborhood. But, more importantly, those who live IN the neighborhood. Athens was tough, as Paul moved to Corinth things were not easy, Bellevue is tough and so is where you live. We are a people blessed with much to steward in a time when one writer notes that we are all "infected with affluenze." We are not to be seen for what we possess, but for who it is that possesses us---the Holy Spirit giving the power and will to steward all to the glory of God.

!!!) In mission, to love God, to keep the great commandment to love one another, to live in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, that leads to be reconciled to one another that we might be bold in witness where our feet land each day.

I invite you to be about growth in Christ. Confidence in God, Sabbath living and loving that builds in us a renewed passion to be with one another in the challenge of the worship at Synod Assembly yesterday---to Rise...Resurrection, Respiration, Reformation with this prayer---

"O God, we have our being in you and you alone.
Recall us from our wanderings; reclaim us as your own.
Restore in us the image revealed in Christ, your Word,
till hear and will pay homage to him, our God and Lord."

In Jesus' name, let it be. Amen.