

PENTECOST 2

Proper 4 - Year B

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁴ But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ 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.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

How interesting that our collect entreats God to give us profitable things, and God’s wisdom dispensed in this reading is fairly direct: We need to order our lives, at least to the extent that it depends on us, correctly. Keeping the sabbath day holy – ordering it – involves corporate worship and thanksgiving to the God who made us and abstaining from those busy practices that take our attention away from God. And further, we are to allow and encourage others in our charge to rest from labor, too.

Keeping the sabbath, while it may feel strange, is faithfulness; in the process, we slow or stop our consumption and distraction, instead worshipping and trusting God, who has delivered us and our forebears time and time again.

Discussion Questions

Who in your life needs a reminder to rest?

What are the obstacles to your rest?

Psalm 81:1-10

- ¹ Sing with joy to God our strength *
and raise a loud shout to the God of Jacob.
- ² Raise a song and sound the timbrel, *
the merry harp, and the lyre.
- ³ Blow the ram's-horn at the new moon, *
and at the full moon, the day of our feast.
- ⁴ For this is a statute for Israel, *
a law of the God of Jacob.
- ⁵ He laid it as a solemn charge upon Joseph, *
when he came out of the land of Egypt.
- ⁶ I heard an unfamiliar voice saying *
"I eased his shoulder from the burden;
his hands were set free from bearing the
load."
- ⁷ You called on me in trouble, and I saved you; *
I answered you from the secret place of
thunder
and tested you at the waters of Meribah.
- ⁸ Hear, O my people, and I will admonish you: *
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
- ⁹ There shall be no strange god among you; *
you shall not worship a foreign god.
- ¹⁰ I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt
and said, *
"Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Once again, we hear the call to remember God and the proper ordering of our lives. God set us free; God led us through the desert; God so loved us that he sent his only begotten son to show us how to live; God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and opened the way of salvation for all of us.

If this is true – and we believe it is – how then should we live? The psalmist suggests that we sing and shout and make music with joy, that we *keep* holy the days that *are* holy, that we call on God in our troubles, and that we trust in God's power to deliver.

Discussion Questions

How have you experienced God's faithfulness?

What will you do to respond to that faithfulness?

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, ⁹ persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, ¹⁰ always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us but life in you.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Continuing the theme of right ordering, Paul writes to the Corinthians a litany of ways that God's power works in us – not because we're particularly great and we've won a prize for it, but because God is extraordinarily powerful and extraordinarily good.

Receiving this glorious gift – a gift that prevents crushing, despair, forsakenness, and destruction – compels us to share it with others. It is unique among gifts in that, even though more and more people partake of it, it is never diminished. So – rightly ordering our lives in service of the God who saves us means living in right relationship with our neighbors, too.

Discussion Questions

With whom have you shared God's power and grace?

Who shared God's power and grace with you?

Mark 2:23-3:6

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, ²⁶ how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?” ²⁷ Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

3 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” ⁴ Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Finally, in our gospel reading for today, our Lord demonstrates his lordship over all things, including the sabbath itself. Jesus and his disciples disregard the political and religious laws and customs – provocative actions, of course. And perhaps Jesus could have found a more polite way to have the conversation with the Pharisees. But he forces the point, here: faithfulness to the sabbath is *not* faithfulness to a rule book; rather, it is faithfulness to the God who institutes the sabbath. Our devotion should always be directed to God, and while that often includes faithfulness to God’s church, we must be wise and discern if and when they are ever at odds.

Discussion Questions

If you were a Pharisee, how do you think you would have responded to Jesus?

Where have you seen structures stand in the way of the exercise of love?