

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Why are you here today? No, I'm not trying to discourage you from being here. Why are you here today? That question has two parts...why are you HERE today? And why are you here TODAY? To the latter question, you might answer, "Because it's the Sabbath?" You'd be wrong! You heard Moses instruct the Israelites: "*the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.*" The 7<sup>th</sup> day is Saturday, not Sunday. Sunday is the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week; we call it the Lord's Day, but it is not the Sabbath.

So why are you here on this Lord's Day? To worship? Certainly we do that, but that's not the main reason to be here, for "worship" is an action verb, and that places the emphasis in the wrong place. Yes, worship is an action verb. Worship is the act of ascribing worth to something. Worship is our modern way of saying "worth-ship." Here at church, we apply that to God, but people worship many things. You know the many idols that people hold up for worship — they become their gods. But for us at church, it's worship of God. The dictionary defines worship this way: it means to "to render religious reverence and homage, as to a deity" (Dictionary.com)—show reverence, honor, and respect to God.

And, to be sure, we do that. We honor the Lord our God when we gather together; we revere Him; we give Him praise and thanks, in word and song. We do these things. But speaking about what we "do" gives the impression that man was made for the Sabbath, and that God set aside the 7<sup>th</sup> day as Sabbath so that we would worship Him. But that has things completely backwards.

Jesus tells us instead that "*the Sabbath was made for man,*" for our benefit, both physical and spiritual.

Certainly, the Sabbath serves as a reminder that the Lord is God, and that He made us. I'm pretty sure you know that the word Sabbath is just a transliteration of the Hebrew word, Shabbat, and that word means "rest." God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, that is, He ceased from all his work of creating on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, and so He set that day apart as a day of rest; He made it a holy day for us, saying, so should we cease from all our work and rest physically.

Long before modern science's advances, the Lord knew the importance of physical rest, including sleep, for our well-being. Now modern science tells us that "Sleep serves to reenergize the body's cells, clear waste from the brain, and support learning and memory. It even plays vital roles in regulating mood, appetite and libido" (Scientific American, "What Happens in the Brain during Sleep"). It may seem obvious, but the Lord "*does not faint or grow weary*" (Is. 40:28). He is after all, "*Lord of the Sabbath.*" But we do, young and old alike, and we require rest.

But the Sabbath day was about more than simply physical rest. It was a day to rest in the Lord. It was a day to remember His mighty deliverance: that once the Israelites were slaves “*in the land of Egypt, [but] the LORD [their] God brought [them] out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*” It was a day to continue to receive His goodness, His grace and mercy, as it is for us. For, as Jesus taught, “*the Sabbath was made for man,*” that man might find refreshment in the Lord, that is, in Christ, the One who suffered for you, to deliver you from your bondage to sin, who blotted out your sins. And He invites you who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him and find rest for your souls (Matt. 11:28). His Sabbath command is really an invitation to come to Him, two or three in His name (Matt. 18:20), come into His presence and enjoy “*times of refreshing*” (Acts 3:18-20) from the heart of Him from whom flow living waters (John 7:38).

Indeed, the promise of the Sabbath rest was not fully realized until Jesus. The Israelites of old, led by Moses, didn’t “*enter [their] rest*” because they “*were disobedient.*” They were “*unable to enter because of unbelief,*” the writer to the Hebrews says (Heb. 3:18-19). Although Joshua led Israel across the Jordan into the promised land, yet we’re told, “*if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on*” (Heb. 4:8).

Yes, “*there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God*” (Heb. 4:9), for you and me, as we trust not in our own works, but in Christ’s work for us, “*for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his*” (Heb. 4:10), for in Christ, that is believing in Him, all your labors are done. There is your rest. That’s the Gospel as Luther describes it: “*The gospel says ‘Believe this’ and it is already done*” (Heidelberg Disputation, #26).

And so, our Sabbath refreshment comes from being in Christ, not from going to church on a particular day. In fact, the Sabbath in that way, and festivals, are but a shadow of the things to come (Col. 2:16-17). The substance is Christ; it’s really all about Christ. In fact, we join with the apostles and the whole Christian Church in gathering together on the first day of the week, on Sundays, because of Christ, because He rose from the dead on the first day of the week. And so we call it the Lord’s Day, but we can actually gather on any day of the week, for this day is really about being in Jesus, that is, receiving the gifts He wants to give us: forgiveness, life, and salvation received through Holy baptism, His word read and preached, and the Supper of His body and blood.

That’s why we Lutherans normally don’t refer to our gatherings in the name of Jesus as “worship” but as “Divine Service,” for here, we confess, is where Jesus comes especially to serve us. We gather together to be refreshed in Jesus, to receive His grace, to be assured that our way into the promised land is open, and

then to give all glory and praise to God the Father through the Son in the unity of the Spirit.

For, you see, there's an order to these things, as we've preached about recently. St. John says, the love of God is expressed toward us through the Son whom God sent into the world, and through His atoning sacrifice for us—there's our Sabbath rest. But then He exhorts us to love (1 John 4), or as St. Paul says, to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices which is our spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1). Again, St. John says, we can bear the fruit of love only as branches attached to Jesus, the true vine. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. (John 15).

For God has an order; I hope you're here today and every Lord's Day to follow this order: to receive first, and then to love in response. That's the way it is with regard to the Sabbath; it was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And so, we gather together to rest in Jesus, to receive His gifts in the Divine Service first, and then to offer up the fruit of lips that praise His name in worship (Heb. 13:15).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.