

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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Worship This Week Sept. 21, 2025

SCRIPTURES –

Exodus 20:8-11 –

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”

Matthew 12:1-12 –

At about that time Jesus was walking through some grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they began breaking off some heads of grain and eating them. 2 But some Pharisees saw them do it and protested, “Look, your disciples are breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath.” 3 Jesus said to them, “Haven’t you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He went into the house of God, and he and his companions broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. 5 And haven’t you read in the law of Moses that the priests on duty in the Temple may work on the Sabbath? 6 I tell you, there is one here who is even greater than the Temple! 7 But you would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ 8 For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!” 9 Then Jesus went over to their synagogue, 10 where he noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Does the law permit a person to work by healing on the Sabbath?” (They were hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against him.) 11 And he answered, “If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you work to pull it out? Of course you would. 12 And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to do good on the Sabbath.”

PRAYER OVER SCRIPTURE –

MESSAGE – It's not too difficult to see exactly what God is commanding. Simply, He commands us to Observe the Sabbath, keep it holy and rest.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees gradually took this command much further than was intended. They banned virtually every activity on the Sabbath. Jesus set the record straight. He and his disciples got in trouble with the Pharisees because they harvested wheat, which was considered labour in their minds. The reality is that they were just hungry. Why starve? So pick the wheat. In Jesus mind – which is God's mind – the Sabbath is not a day to sit around and do nothing. We can do good on that day.

It took Jesus showing up to set us straight. When we combine the words of God through Moses with some clarification from Jesus, this is what we get:

First, make it part of our routine. The key word is “remember,” which, put another way, means “don't forget.” Establish it. Do what you have to do so as not to forget. Put it on your daytimer and set up a reminder the same as you would for an important meeting. And not just for churchy people, but for everyone. Moses clearly writes that servants and foreigners are included. In 21st century language, that literally means everyone: not just workaholic business owners and executives who don't know when to quit, but also the people who scoop ice cream and flip burgers. Everyone.

Second, this rest is to be about God – rest is “dedicated to the Lord your God.” Everything in life is to be done for the glory of God and the Sabbath day of rest is no different. This is why we go to church on Sunday. In the good old days, there was morning worship, lunch, followed by a nap, then late afternoon worship. It's where we get the term “. . . and twice on Sundays.”

Third, use it to relax and feel good. It's about rejuvenation. Resting does not mean you can't cook or give someone a hand. When God said no one may do any work, it would be defined as labour for which we earn money. There are obvious exceptions: we need first responders and hospital staff and crews to restore utilities if they fail. That's why Jesus said “If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you work to pull it out? Of course you would.”

There are many benefits of rest. Physically, rest allows the heart to recover by lowering heart rate and blood pressure, which reduces strain and helps regulate

stress hormones. Rest helps the body recover from physical stress, preventing overuse injuries and reducing chronic pain. Rest supports the production of proteins that fight infection and inflammation, strengthening the body's defenses against illness. A lack of sleep increases the body's sensitivity to pain. Rest is linked to a lower risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Rest positively influences skin health, contributing to a healthier complexion. Mentally, rest helps our memories and cognitive functioning, the ability to learn and problem-solve, to concentrate, focus and boosts creativity, which all leads to greater productivity. Emotionally, rest helps restore emotional balance, reduces stress and improves our overall mood. And so on.

The command given to Moses “to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” and to “rest” was directed at the entire nation; it was something they were to go together, as a people. It was not a “do it your way” kind of command, where the Sabbath means something different for you than it means for me. A truly restful day cannot happen if some of us are working and some are not.

So – what would this eternal truth look like today if we really took it seriously, at face value? In this perfect world, we would have a uniform day of rest to worship and gather socially, or just to chill. In Moses’ day, it would have been Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. In the new covenant under Christ, it’s Sunday. Canada, as a nation whose Charter of Rights is founded on the supremacy of God – and this means the God of the Bible – we would establish and maintain a universal day of family gatherings and picnics. Nothing would be open, not even gas stations, pharmacies or corner stores, because we can live 24 hours without them – those aren’t emergency services. We would be disciplined to plan ahead and prepare and fill up our tanks on Saturday and make sure we have extra medication and enough food. The only people working would be first responders and church workers and the only places open would be hospitals, the 911 call centre and the nuclear power plant. This is in keeping with Jesus’ point that if there was an accident, like your sheep fell into a well, you’d pull it out. All in all, it would be a truly special day. And in a world in which we are so divided – and getting worse it seems every week – how refreshing that would be.

Unfortunately, I cannot see that happening any time soon. If there’s a word that describes life in the 21st century, at least in North America, it’s “busy.” With the Internet, the world no longer sleeps. It used to be that when the sun went down in your time zone, you locked the door and the closest thing to connection to

people far, far away was your TV or radio. Now, the world literally does not sleep. I can go online and buy something on Amazon or wherever at 3 a.m. In my inbox are emails sent by people in my time zone at 2 a.m. when sensible people should be resting. Same with social media posts and replies.

How did we get to where we are today, where Sunday is just another day? Until the mid 19th century, Sunday was truly the Lord's Day and nothing happened except church. Starting with a decree by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 321 and continuing well into the 18 century, it was taught, practiced and enforced. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) chapter 21, refers to the Sabbath Day of worship as a command of God and as "the law of nature."

It was to be "kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations" while not neglecting urgent matters which might arise in that 24 hour period. A century later, in the 1700s, the British Parliament enacted a law which banned any commercial activity on Sunday.

Jump ahead another 100 years and something happened called the Industrial Revolution. Roads were improved and railways were built, which offered people the opportunity to get out and about more. Sunday was starting to become not only a day of worship but a day of recreation. Picnics and ice cream. The church saw what was going on and got organized. The Lord's Day Alliance was formed in 1888 by mainstream Christian denominations to lobby for the passage of Sunday-rest laws. It had support from labour unions. With support from French Canadian Catholic hierarchy and organized labour, the Lord's Day Act was proclaimed by Parliament in 1906, which banned commercial activity, entertainment, and sports on Sundays, although provinces could allow certain things in moderation.

Things were loosened up in the 1960s; Parliament passed amendments to allow cultural and recreational activities, agricultural and trade shows, scientific exhibitions and horse racing. The Lord's Day Act was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1985 on the grounds that it contravened the freedom of religion and conscience – it was too centred on the Christian Faith. However, in Ontario, stores remained closed on Sunday until 1992 because that ban was not based on religion but rather the rights of workers and families to have a day off

together. Public pressure forced the Ontario government in 1992 to allow stores to open. And since that time, we see the rise of online commerce.

It may appear that Sunday shopping is a dead issue. However, The Lord's Day Alliance continues strong in the U.S. has been renamed Rising Day Ministries with staff and a board of directors and advisers. Unfortunately, the Canadian wing folded in 1994. The U.S. group has plenty of arguments in favour of restoring a uniform day of rest. Here's a few quotes:

"Our Sabbath, Sunday is like a weekly retreat, a time of renewal and celebration, a time for recognizing our blessings and sharing joy with others. The very act of observing Sunday is a reminder of the covenant and an invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with God. Sunday is a time of both church attendance and family gatherings, but our Christian tradition of keeping Sunday as an "Easter experience" is too often watered down to an "obligation" or just a day to catch up on chores. . . . Let us aim to make our Sundays more about being available to God and nurturing our "domestic church," the Church in miniature in our own homes. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life." (See [Teaching About the Joy of Sunday](#))

This is a relatively small movement and it's not getting much attention. Aside from the fact that they are onto something, what's powerful is that it's supported not only by very conservative Christians but also by those who support the rights of workers, most of them are on the far left, politically. In a world in which we are increasingly divided politically, the fact that people on opposite ends of the spectrum can find common ground is a great source of hope. They all make the point that while laws banning Sunday shopping were struck down in the name of freedom to choose, that choice does not extend to those who are forced to work on Sundays. Here's a quote from a blog from a Christian writer 2021: "The Walmart greeter at the door first thing Sunday morning likely doesn't have much choice about when she works. She, like most people, is assigned her hours. Would she rather be there making meagre but necessary earnings rather than spending her time with her family or loved ones? . . . To large corporations, Sundays are simply another day in which revenue must be accumulated, and thus people must show up for work." It's been argued that

24/7 commerce and Sunday shopping benefits the owners and shareholders more than workers and consumers. (See: [Restore the Lord's Day Act](#))

It's a difficult issue. On the one hand, I am a libertarian at heart and I stand for freedom of choice. I don't hide my political philosophy. If a business wants to open and people want to buy, why should the government stop them? On the other hand, we have a God who knows best – and He knows human nature. He knows that we are not to be trusted. And He knows that we are often incapable of making the right decisions. So he makes them for us. Hence the Fourth Commandment. Hence the human laws such as the Lord's Day Act which reflect that.

Sometimes, too much freedom is a bad thing. In a sense, people are like young children who can't make proper decisions. It's why we do not allow children to eat anything they want or video games and watch TV every waking moment of the day – otherwise we'd be raising sick and messed up little monsters. Grown adults are like children in some ways – we don't know what's best for us. God knows us. Again, that's why we have the fourth commandment. After six days of creation, God rested. We need to do the same.

And so, when I ask, what does it look like in the 21st century if we truly followed God's command, we can lobby and speak out for the resurrection of a new Lord's Day Act, but realistically, all we can do is practice that command on our own. In my world, I try to take most of Friday and all of Saturday off as my days of rest. That is not always possible. When I can't, I carve our time here and there during the week. I am blessed to have that ability. It's a luxury most others don't have. With the exception of Sunday morning and specific times of the week for meetings, I set my own schedule. And when I take a vacation week, I have finally mastered the discipline of not looking at my work email. I can easily find time to rest on a physical level. It's the other types of rest – mental, emotional and spiritual – that I still wrestle with. I am not alone. In the 21st century, we can rest from our jobs and chores and still feel tired because it's seemingly impossible to escape the negativity, the angst, the division, the anxiety. It's a spiritual thing. We pick it up from the people around us.

So I am learning to set boundaries. If the entire community isn't resting, I need to set up a bit of separation. I find it in the garden, pulling some evil weeds. I can be in my kayak upstream of Dresden, where there are few homes backing onto the river and it's just me and no one's looking for my attention. I am surrounded

by quiet water, towering trees and an amazing assortment of birds and turtles. And then another boat passes by and breaks my communion with God and nature. But that's OK, because at least I was able to get in one hour of alone time with God.

Let's keep in mind the purpose of the Sabbath Day and rest. Jesus clarified things in Mark 2:27: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." Sunday to worship and to rest are for us. For a reason.

In the 21st century, my prayer is that each of us will be able to "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honoured by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world" (Psalm 46:10) to carve out that time of rest, talk to God, listen for His voice, see His hands in nature or wherever we find ourselves. Sabbath was made for us. Amen.