

## WHAT'S SUNDAY FOR?

Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Mark 2:23-3:6 [MW18-19]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 03 June 2018

What do you think Sunday is for?

- space for reflection and sharing

Both our Bible readings today are about “the Sabbath”

- I'm not going to get into the issue of “Sabbath” and “Sunday” that vexes many scholars, and others
- for our purposes it makes sense to equate “the Sabbath” with our Sunday

So, it was in my first year at university when I made the observation that

- waking up in the morning, in the university hall of residence you could just tell it was Sunday
- Sunday morning looked and felt different it was not like any other day
- I reckoned that even if you didn't look at the calendar or listen to the radio, read the newspaper, watch TV you would know it was Sunday
- Sunday was different

I think it was also around that time that the American singer, Kenny Rogers

- came to New Zealand he was being interviewed on the evening news
- and quipped that he arrived in New Zealand on Sunday and found that it was closed
- and maybe he was right ... back then most shops were closed on Sunday you couldn't buy alcohol
- malls, plazas and hardware stores were not hives of activity there was no such thing as “The Warehouse” you could walk through the city and it would be quiet
- with a distinct lack of activity

Was that a bad thing?

- Kenny Rogers seemed to think it was but I'm not so sure
- seems to me there is something healthy about having one day a week that is different
- certainly the Lord God considered this of supreme importance we heard in Deuteronomy 5:12 “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”

Any thoughts what that might mean for us in 21<sup>st</sup> century New Zealand?

- space for reflection and sharing

There was to be one day which was free of ordinary, everyday activities

- it marked the rhythm of the week  
after all the Lord God “rested” on the seventh day  
it was part of the rhythm of creation, the rhythm of life
- apparently we are made that way and it is good for us  
it is also an opportunity to step aside from the usual routine  
and be refreshed
- just as it is important to draw aside and acknowledge the place of the Lord God  
in our individual and corporate life

In Deuteronomy the people of God were reminded

- that they had six other days to get everything done  
but that the seventh day was to be different
- it was a “Sabbath” to the Lord God  
and the activities of this day were not to be the same as the activities  
of the other six days
- this was good for body and soul

Personally, I did not mind that I couldn't go to the supermarket on Sunday

- it was no bother that a whole lot of things didn't happen because it was Sunday  
it was actually great to have one day when most people were “free”  
and could plan to do “people” stuff
- recall those leisurely Sunday afternoon drives and picnics?

Remember Sunday is not just like any other day

- and was not supposed to be like any other day  
the problem was that when we get to the incident recorded in Mark's gospel  
and in fact even life here not all that long ago
- people took this to extremes  
strictly, rigidly and dare I say it, religiously, limiting the things  
that can and cannot be done on a Sunday

In a Bible study group I was leading, one of the members recalled growing up in Invercargill

- Sundays were very, very boring in his strict Presbyterian family  
you could go for a walk but not play cricket, or even throw a ball  
playing cards were banned though you could read, but only “wholesome” books  
(in fact I have a bound collection of the 'Sunday At Home Journal' from the 1880s)
- this was the kind of thing Jesus was objecting to  
narrowly and rigidly sticking to rules  
that might mean someone endured pain, or even died  
because they were inconsiderate enough to become ill on a Sunday!

If a rule, a test, a yardstick is really needed, Jesus gives it in Mark 3:4

*On the Sabbath should we do good deeds or evil deeds?  
Should we save someone's life or destroy it?*

When challenged about what his disciples were doing on a Sabbath, Jesus replied:

*People were not made for the good of the Sabbath  
The Sabbath was made for the good of people*

- any ideas what that's on about? Space for reflection and sharing

Two observations:

- I don't usually mow the lawn on a Sunday  
but when I do have to and use the petrol engine lawn mower  
it just doesn't feel right
- I know you can't go back, but something significant changed for our nation  
when Sunday trading came in  
which is why the Vestry of the Parish I was Vicar of at the time  
made a strong submission objecting to it in 1990
- and I still don't really like going to the supermarket on Sunday!

Reflecting on how followers of Jesus are called to a different rhythm of life

- one of my favourite authors, Philip Gulley, a Pastor in small-town USA  
wrote about something he called "The Slow Life"
- here are a couple of paragraphs [*Porch Talk*, pages 39-40]

I asked my church for a summer off. The first two months I relaxed, then during the third month I buckled down and went on vacation. It seems odd that I would have to leave my church to restore my soul, but that is precisely what happened. A woman in my meeting was opposed to this. "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," she warned me. I didn't find the devil in my leisure. I found mindfulness, clarity, and renewal. Sometimes those who hesitate aren't lost, but found.

One of the qualities I most admire about Jesus was his high regard for the right speed. Never one to rush panting toward some desired goal, he noticed what others overlooked - a crippled man beside the pool of Siloam, a woman at a well, a tax collector looking on from a tree. The church attributed such sensitivity to his divine nature, which conveniently excused us from being like him. But I contend, as did he, that such attentiveness, such well-paced and measured living, can also be ours. "And why are you anxious? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, nor do they spin" (Matthew 6:28).

But in a world where time is money, where idle hands are the devil's workshop, those who live the slow life are seen as suspect, if not heretical. To them, I simply say that when God spoke to Elijah, it was not in the earthquake, wind, or fire, but in a small and restful voice, a divine drawl, if you will, a porch voice.

And what does that voice tell us? To not be so busy living the good life we've forgotten how to enjoy life.

So what might all this mean for us in Kaiwaka/Wellsford in June 2018?

- I think it reminds us that we need a regular "time out"  
we are made this way, creation was designed this way  
and life is healthy when we do this
- we are to take a set day each week when we stop our normal routine  
we are to take time out and acknowledge the Lord God
- ideally this would be on a Sunday  
and it is easier if we are able to do this with a community, as we are doing now
- however Sunday may not be possible  
so there should be a regular alternative day

We are also to have a day each week when we "recharge"

- again, ideally, this would be Sunday  
but we are not to become slaves to this  
it may not work out all the time, but is something to aim for
- a day each week to take a break from the normal routine  
to be refreshed, recharged, re-created

This takes us back to the rhythm of creation

- there were six days during which things happened and the seventh day was different, a rest, a break
  - this enables re – creation to take place
- do you get that ... recreation is “re” creation  
being made again ...

We are to build this into our lives

- and into the lives of the groups that we are part of

A “day of rest” - “Sunday”

- it may seem kind of quaint, old fashioned but I believe we lost something when we decided to go the way of Kenny Rogers and be open and on the go 24/7
- our calling as followers of Jesus is first of all to observe Sunday and engage in it ourselves by having this regular day when we acknowledge God as our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life
- and alongside this make the time and space to engage in re-creation activities

Second of all, our challenge is to help the acknowledgement of the place of God in life

- and the observance of a “day of rest and re-creation” to happen in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society

Not easy I know

- however it is vital for our health as a nation, as local communities as families and as individuals

And to help us with what we take away and reflect on and act on

- here is Joy Cowley's “The Quiet Pool”

*There is within each of us a quiet clear pool of living water  
fed by the one deep Source and inseparable from it,  
but so often hidden by a tangle of activity  
that we may not know of its existence.*

*We can spend the proverbial forty years wandering in strange deserts,  
sinking unrewarding wells  
and moving on, driven by our thirst,  
but when we stop still long enough to look inside ourselves,  
really look beyond our ideas about water  
and what and where it should be,  
we discover it was with us all the time,  
that quiet clear pool which is ageless,  
the meaning of our existence and the answer to all wanderings.*

*And as we drink,  
we know what Jesus meant when he said  
we'd never be thirsty again.*

Amen