

Jeremiah 1: 4-10, Hebrews 12: 18-29, Lk 13.10-17

The late Archbishop William Temple, when he was a primate of England, once told his story. One morning, in a house where he was a guest, he heard the cook singing lustily, "Nearer, My God to Thee, Nearer to Thee." He was impressed that she was singing hymns, and he spoke of it to his host. The host replied, "Oh, yes. That is how she boils the eggs – three verses for soft boiled and five for hard." The Archbishop thought the cook was expressing her faith. All she was doing was timing her eggs. She was using this hymn for her own business, and through which she lost the meaning of this hymn. Likewise, we see from the gospel portion, that sabbath practice, which was abused by the Jewish people by practicing it for their own business. Various codes and practices evolved around this seventh day and the religious leaders interpreted and enforced the rules. This gave them status, set them over their people and thus the abuse of the Sabbath day was taken place.

The Biblical scholars say that there is a danger we face whenever we talk about the Sabbath, especially when we read the Book of Exodus 20: 8-11. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work." But God didn't go into specific details in giving this command. He didn't give us a list of what not to do, or what to do instead. The tempted religious community responded to this by, themselves, created the list of "do's" and "don'ts" that God didn't give.

Many people have set out to keep other people in line by hedging them in with man-made rules that regulated the Sabbath day. And as a result, they turned God's day of rest - into a legalistic burden of prohibitions. Regarding the sabbath worship the Old Testament says very little about sabbath worship. But the Scripture strongly emphasises sabbath rest. The Hebrew word for sabbath is sabbat, which is a noun, and it is derived from sabat, means "to cease", primarily from work.

The book of Isaiah 58: 13 & 14 reveals that Sabbath is meant by God for our good and doing good for others. Since God loves us He gave this fourth commandment to enjoy His blessings to the fullest degree; and this passage teaches us that remembering and honouring His holy day and His way, will lead to blessedness and fulfilment in our lives.

With cause/effect relationship God says,
"If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
If you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable;
If you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or
pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the Lord."

Through these words God reminds us that the Lord of the Sabbath blesses those who keep His holy day in God's way. I believe that this particular portion of Scripture gives us the clearest description we could ask for of what God wants us to do on the Sabbath day. And the answer can be found in Jesus' compassionate service offered to a woman on the sabbath day in a synagogue.

Jesus Christ introduces the sabbath as a manifestation of God's love and compassion

Jesus Christ habitually attended the synagogue on the sabbath day. He taught God's word; performed good works of necessity and righteousness; and healed the afflicted. Truly His was the true and divinely intended way of observing the sabbath. Today's gospel passage narrates Jesus' encounter with the religious leader in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Jesus saw a woman in the synagogue who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. When Jesus saw her, he called her, and said; "woman, you are set free from your ailment." Jesus laid his hands on her and immediately she stood up straight and began to praise God.

The leader of the synagogue became indignant on what Jesus did for the woman. He said to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done, come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But Jesus responded to him by re-defining the meaning of Sabbath and revealing the spiritual meaning of work. Jesus deconstructed the Jewish religious notion of work. For Jesus, healing is not a work, but an act, which emerges from love and compassion. Jesus gave a new meaning to sabbath, a divine channel of love and compassion.

By giving healing, Jesus honours sabbath specifically as a day of showing compassion. As Lord of the Sabbath, He consecrates it by His Spirit for the worship of God, as well as for the service of humankind. His constant compassion for human suffering is a mirror of His compassionate heart for us.

Jesus Christ introduces the sabbath as a sign of fellowship

One of the blessings of the Sabbath is the opportunity to assemble together on that day. Fellowshiping with the people of God is truly another great blessing from God that the Sabbath day affords. For many of us, the Sabbath is the major day that we are able to see our beloved sisters and brothers. As 1 John 1:3 says: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

We have more time to communicate with one another on the Sabbath. We are able to pray effectively for others because we have more than a cursory knowledge of one another's needs and health issues. The Sabbath is a special time of fellowshiping with God. The Congregation

of Israel would literally come to the physical temple on the Sabbath to be in God's presence.

As the children of God, we assemble together to meet with our God and with our sisters and brothers. Every time we miss services, we miss an opportunity to be in God's presence. We collectively assemble together to worship God. We do this by praising God through music, by learning more about God through preaching, and by fellowshiping with one another.

Having confidence in God's word, let me lay this meditation to us in the form of a challenge. Let us pray and ask God to help us to begin now to honour His day. Let us do as He says - turn our foot from our own pursuits on His day, treat His day as a delight, and honour His day as we should. May our loving God enable us to experience the sabbath as a day of fellowship, love and compassion. Amen.