

# The St. John's Pulpit

St. John's Baptist Church 300 Hawthorne Lane Charlotte, NC 28204  
704.333.5428 [www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

## **YOU ARE NOT A ROBOT**

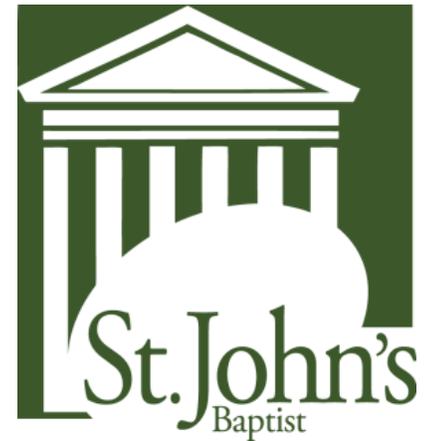
Exodus 16:22-30; 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Mark 2:23-3:6

Sermon 5 of 14 in Summer Series

*The Ten Commandments for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Calling of Wisdom*

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 9, 2017

The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister



One of the many wonderful things about St. John's is our congregational sense of humor. One of our members recently chuckled and asked if I had decided the people of St. John's need to review The Ten Commandments this summer because of things I have been observing in your lives. Of course, I responded with a truthful answer by saying, "Well No; and Yes."

This fourth commandment, "*Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy,*" deserves our attention. The 4th commandment is not only the longest commandment, it is so significant that some Rabbis teach you can observe all the commandments by observing this commandment faithfully; but, desecrate this one and you desecrate them all. You should allow the message of this commandment to settle into the bones and tissues of your living souls. **This commandment is about aligning your living with God's life.**

From ancient days, each generation has struggled with this commandment. With tongues in our cheeks, we realize that no other generation has wrestled with this 4<sup>th</sup> commandment like ours. No other generation has worked as hard punching keys or pushing buttons or flipping switches as does ours. We cannot enjoy the last moments of the soccer game because we must remotely change the temperature in our home. We pass the clicker to the person who can get us to Netflix so we can binge watch the entire season of the series released last night because everyone else is already talking about it on snapchat. We send texts; forward emails; tweet; download apps; set the DVR to record; read the blogs; post pics; watch THAT YouTube video again and again and again; and try to beat our high score on that game. We are busy! **Has there ever been a people to work so hard at easy living?** Sabbath Keeping can just get in the way of our busy lives. Now, with our tongues out of our cheeks, let me offer a perspective.

Beloved, you need to be Sabbath Keepers. This principle of Sabbath Keeping, although ancient, is proven to be foundational to healthy living and a healthy society. You know how you must prove you are not a robot on websites by discerning those squiggly letters and numbers or identifying which pictures have a storefront? When you do not live as a Sabbath Keeper, you become like a robot. So, I offer you two reasons to be a Sabbath Keeper.

1. **SABBATH KEEPING SAVES YOU FROM THE BONDAGE OF SLAVERY.**

When you REMEMBER THE SABBATH, you are participating in an act of resistance. Sabbath Keeping is your act of resistance against having your value determined by your productivity – or the lack thereof.

When the Hebrews lived in Egyptian bondage, they worked seven days a week in shifts; there were no breaks, no holidays, no vacations, no sick days. They WERE like robots; they worked until they couldn't.

The rhythm of this world seeks to enslave you; to place you in bondage to its ways. Our culture pulls you in thousands of directions with layers of demands. Your core commitment to a relationship with God and to God's mission can become lost on your 'to do list.' You know people who are enslaved by their multiple interests or their work? I like this anonymous poem:

If you hold your nose  
To the grindstone rough,  
And hold it down there long enough,  
You'll soon forget there are such things  
As brooks that babble,  
Or birds that sing.  
And, soon, your world will be composed  
Of you  
Your grindstone,  
And your ground-down nose.

Beloved, Sabbath Keeping helps you avoid the burden of bondage in a tangible world.

Sabbath Keeping allows you to claim your freedom from empty and meaningless materialism. Sabbath Keeping reminds you that you were created for a relationship with God.

Sabbath Keeping frees you to follow the Spirit of God involved in God's mission.

By Keeping the Sabbath, you acknowledge that God is active and moving in the world and in your life and through your work as your ministry in daily life.

This is what we see in the story of Exodus 16 which Judy read with us. Today, we can fall victim to the belief that we are the only one or ones on whom we can depend. In the ancient world, the only people who enjoyed leisure time or ‘days off’ were the wealthy – because the labor of others assured their comforts would be provided. During the exodus and wilderness wanderings, manna was provided each morning – six days a week. And the manna would spoil by the next morning – except on the morning before the Sabbath. By gathering enough manna for two days on the morning before Sabbath, the Hebrews trusted God to provide for them.

Sabbath means ‘*stop or cease from work.*’ The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is not a call to laziness. It says, “*Six days you shall labor and do all your work.*” Then, you stop to ask, “*are my priorities, commitments and efforts in alignment with what God is up to in my life and in the life of the world?*” This is how you live Jesus’ teaching in the Disciples’ Prayer: “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” **Sabbath Keeping saves your life, reassuring your trust in the faithful God and guarding you against bondage to a materialistic world.**

## **2. SABBATH KEEPING ASSURES YOU ENJOY YOUR LIFE AS GOD INTENDS.**

Ecclesiastes 3 teaches that ‘all time is sacred.’ A reporter once asked a 95-year old quilter, “*Including quilting, throughout your 95 years of life, what has been your favorite use of time?*” The woman said, “*Honey, your time is your life; you had better enjoy all of it.*”

Jesus walked in the world when it was difficult to enjoy life on the Sabbath. There were more than 1500 Sabbath Laws including ‘*not walking more than a mile without eating;*’ ‘*not cooking;*’ ‘*not cutting mushrooms;*’ ‘*not removing coals from the oven;*’ etc. It was if humans had been created to serve the Sabbath.

Jesus’ disciples ate some grain from the fields one Sabbath and the rule-obsessed critics condemned their actions. Jesus used the occasion to teach. He walked into the synagogue. A man was there who lived with a withered hand. Jesus knew the hearts of these who elevated themselves over the value of this one with a withered hand. So, Jesus asked them, “*Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?*” They were silent. Jesus was furious with them over their hardness of heart. Jesus healed the man. And the Sabbath Law Enthusiasts went out conspiring evil with others how to destroy Jesus. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was made for you to reboot, to push the reset button in your relationship with God; you were not made to serve the Sabbath.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was one of the most influential Jewish theologians and writers in the western world during the 20th century. Heschel's narrow escape to the United States from Poland is a story in and of itself. His family was desecrated by Hitler's evil Nazism and two of his sisters were killed in concentration camps.

In Heschel's book, *The Sabbath*, he points out that Sabbath is the first thing named Holy in scripture. He teaches how Sabbath redeems all time. Sabbath Keeping reminds you why you do what you do with all your time. Sabbath offers a weekly opportunity for you to remember God's power and your limits while challenging you to align your work with God's work for all your days. Dr. Heschel marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama and was a Jewish participant in Vatican 2. Although he was involved in numerous initiatives, Heschel was an observant Sabbath Keeper. Sabbath Keeping reminds you why you do what you do the way you do. Sabbath Keeping reminds you that you are a partner in the work of God in the world. You set aside one day each week to realign or reset all your days to be in right relationship with God. Sabbath Keeping roots your six-day-a-week efforts in the theological soil of a divine relationship. You are not a robot; you are a Sabbath Keeper enjoying your life.

Let me leave you with an image. The day we use as Sabbath in the Christian tradition is Sunday. Imagine that each day is divided by an archway. However, Sunday's archway has a door dividing one week from another. Every seven days, there is this door named Sunday. Standing at this door, you can look back through the past six passageways – last week. Once you pass through this door, you can see the next six passageways – next week. Some people have removed the hinged door and installed a revolving door on Sunday's archway. They just move from one week into the next without breaking stride. Others have a door on hinges, but they think the door belongs to them; they enjoy leisure, take a nap and have some needed rest - some 'me time' before opening the Sunday door into the next week. Then, there is you, Sabbath Keepers, who come to a purposeful, spiritual stop at each Sunday door to ask, *“Is my life the way God wants me to be? Are my commitments and actions aligned with God's character and mission?”* You make needed adjustments before closing the Sunday door behind you. You are the Sabbath Keepers remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy because you know the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is about aligning you living with God's life. Amen and AMEN!