"So, what's work for?"

Sermon for 6 March 2016

Texts: Galatians 3:5; Isaiah 58; John 5:16-18 & 6:35-40

When I ask this question I am conscious of the need to answer it. We, as a congregation, have expressed the desire to "live in the Word" every day! And, not occasionally only, but we have registered our intent to love one another and to pray every day. Many of those who have preceded us into glory, people of deep faith and Christian devotion, are notable for living in the Word, loving and praying every day!When we think about their lives, by way of praise and aspiration, the words "faithful" and "Christlike" spring to mind! Live in the Word is doable, attainable—***they did it!*** "I would be like Jesus!" we sing. Jesus lived in the Word, walked by the Word openly. The phrase, "it is written" often passed His lips! His knowledge of the Word was intimate, thorough, invaluable—He meditated on the Word, and so expounded it. Jesus' faith walked in His sandals. No wonder then that worldly pleasures, worldly influence, worldly treasures could not entice, enthrall or derail Him from ***His work,*** the life of service, love and prayer! I suppose one could do worse than see one's life of faith, living in the Word, both as believing on Him and trusting in Him. And our work then is living life as Jesus lived life—<u>in the Word, loving God and neighbor and always praying</u>. Work is where we enact our faith. The settings are diverse, the opportunities are varied *but in this world where the battle rages around faith and service (or obedience) <u>we must live as those who know what they are here for!</u>*

> **16 For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." 18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God . . .**

The two-prong attack of the Jews had to do with their revelation regarding the Sabbath and monotheism. **Honor/remember the Sabbath, keep it holy** is the fourth of the ten commandments. (See Ex. 20:8-11) In its original presentation, the commandment is hardly sparse. **Six days you shall labor <u>and do all your work</u>, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.** This day of the seven days of creation is the only one not marked off with the phrase **and the evening and the morning were the _____th day!** This open-ended-ness suggests that we <u>may actually still be in the seventh day</u> which day will close with the coming of the Lord **at the last trumpet.** (I certainly wouldn't build my whole theology on that point, but it is thought-provoking.) Furthermore perhaps I should be diligent to observe that man was created *in the likeness* of his Creator in his capacity to work—the Father works, the Son works and the man whom they created is made to work the garden! This is a likeness in activity that parallels a likeness in nature, or image. Hence, working but six days is godlike, too.

In it (*<u>My</u>* Sabbath) **you shall do <u>no</u> work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, <u>nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.</u>** That means neither man, nor beast is exempt-

ed from the Sabbath restriction of labor, or work. All are to rest, to be quiet and to abide in the Lord's presence! Why? Because the Lord said so. He is Lord over time, over production, over all work . . . we are free to work during the time allotted, but not on His time! Then, the explanation follows that because God created the heavens, the earth and all therein *in six days* **and rested on the seventh day—He blessed the Sabbath Day.** The fourth commandment includes the second longest explanation—the longest is the second commandment related to graven images, God being jealous for all our worship! God expended the most ink, or chiseled stone on these two points and clearly wants them engraved on our hearts.

Let's turn now to Isaiah 58. This is a crucial chapter on biblical Sabbath keeping. It begins with a scathing declaration of the Israelites, the house of Jacob's sin. Verse 1 reads: **Cry aloud, spare not (don't hold back!) Lift up you voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.** Now follows the pertinent indictment: **Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.** Tone here is one of bitter irony, *the righteous indignation of an offended God,* in language bordering on sarcasm ***because*** nothing could be farther from the truth! God's people are flaming hypocrites—who love "religion," put on airs (read, attitudes), a show of being "spiritual," acting as if they did **did delight to know My ways**—presenting themselves as a righteous nation in deed, but they are not "righteous—" except in show! They have completely forsaken, spiritually broken with, the ordinances, or laws of God. Their faith is all show and no substance; it is damningly insincere. THEN these "fakers" seem astonished that God ignores, has **not seen our fasts. Why have we afflicted our souls and you take no notice?**

Well. . . here's the list. HERE IS WHAT THEY DID DO! You find pleasure in your religiosity and, as you do, you oppress your laborers. (Do that and God will not note your fasts, or the afflictions of your soul.) Where is your sorrow for so sinning against your workers?! So who says God isn't concerned with labor relations?! *And when you fast you are irritable, ill-tempered and contentious—you openly both quarrel and brawl!* Or they fast out of rotten motives: to show others up, or to provoke envy. If you wish to be heard in heaven do not carry on like this . . . it's wicked, carnal, disgusting. Do you strike you workers for not working hard enough, to long enough, or well enough? Do you pick fights with your debtors, refuse to pay your debts—quibble over words, and have vain, hot disputations about rites and ceremonies and the performance of the same. *It would appear that worship wars preceded the founding of the church by several centuries.* Perhaps persecution is in view. Then God indicts them for afflicting their souls unduly—bowing down in sackcloth and ashes! All sad and bad and unhappy. Not at all, in fasting we are commanded to be cheerful, pleasant and joyous. *And we would be, too, if we only kept the fast in God's vein!*

HERE IS WHAT THEY OUGHT TO DO: **Loose the bonds of wickedness.** What? God says we are to free those whom wicked persons have wrongfully imprisoned, or entangled, or sued. We note the excessive fines for discrimination and alleged hate crimes, for protesting abortion or the redress of grievances. We are to lighten the burdens of those oppressed, enslaved unjustly—bonds and contracts made cruelly, violently demanded, foreclosed on, or reflecting extortion or blackmail, or

fraud. The vicious judgments of corrupt judges and wicked governors. **And break ye every yoke of bondage! Share your bread with the hungry. Take in the homeless poor, the cast out people, refugees . . .** those who have no possessions and no place. This is **the fast that I have chosen! Cover the naked . . . look after your extended family.** If a relative is hurting, help out. **Then your light shall break forth like the morning. Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness will go before you.** For the honest truth is that if the people of God behaved in the way that God approves of—there would very little grounds for confusing the gospel with social justice. ***Godliness is socially just! It just is***. The godly are socially aware, they are recruited to the cause of justice—they seek change! And the immediate reward is that God will be BOTH your advance guard and your rear guard as well. Do these things sincerely, **Then you shall call, <u>and the Lord will answer.</u>** AND THESE ARE THE VERY THINGS THAT JESUS WENT ABOUT DOING—WHICH WICKED MEN CONSTRUED AS "BREAKING THE SABBATH!"

Isaiah proceeds to prophesy that if only we would be godly in this way, and if we would show compassion rather than judging, condemning and slandering one another . . . if we would comfort the afflicted; **Then will your light shine in the darkness. T**he Lord will not only protect us, He will personally guide us <u>always</u>, bringing satisfaction even in lean seasons **(**through **drought** and famine). **He will strengthen your bones** (make you healthy!) and **You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water that fails not.** (v.11) And, you will note we are drawing near to the verses which concern us most regarding the Sabbath. However, I would have you observe this with me: all of this Jesus Christ was doing during His earthly ministry, *especially on the Sabbath!* **Some from among you, shall build the old waste places** (the ruins shall be rebuilt, restored—cities blasted by warfare and bombs, rubble filled streets and destroyed homes). **You shall raise the foundations of many generations. . . as Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of the Streets to Dwell in.** (v.12) THERE WILL BE IMMEDIATE <u>AND</u> ETERNAL REWARDS AND BENEFITS!

> **GAL. 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**

With all this, in Isaiah 58, as background, we come to this: **If you turn your foot, on the Sabbath, from doing your own thing—from doing <u>your pleasure</u> on My holy day! <u>And call the Sabbath *a delight*, the holy day of the Lord honorable, . . . not pursuing your own ways</u>.** Not pursuing your own agenda**, or speaking ill-considered words** (words of cursing, wrath and evil) **Then you shall <u>delight yourself</u> in the Lord *on My Sabbath. I will lift you up***, exalt you, and **feed you with all the heritage and promises of Jacob, your father**. (v.14)

Isn't it astonishing how parallel this promise is to the promise as reiterated by Jesus in John 6?! You might think that the Father and the Son were working out of the same game, or play book:

John 6:35 **Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."** ESV

Now let's observe together what "work" Jesus was doing. He was loosing the bonds of oppression, setting those captive to demonic captivity free, canceling the power of sin over hapless human beings, tearing down walls of discrimination and prejudice, overturning legalism and self-salvation, feeding the hungry, clothing, going about doing good, healing and helping the afflicted—including the dying and sometimes even the dead!, helping the poor, befriending the friendless, supporting the value of women and children, returning good for evil, never sinning—in all of this He was keeping the Sabbath *the way that God would have His Sabbath kept—with compassion, diligence and not mere religiosity.* This is our job description!!

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (NIV)

This is not only a faithful keeping of the law, it is the true keeping of the Sabbath for it is alway allowable to do good (and not evil) on the Lord's Day! ***When religion gets in the way of obedience to God (to living in the Word, love and prayer), we should lose the religion—not the obedience!*** To love one another is, most immediately, to **look after your family!** Then, says Isaiah, you will be as dawn breaking, you will be a new day even in your former places—your light, your springs of living water, your powers of redemption, your living testimony will *go forth*, will be *shed abroad*! **Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer.** Your bones will be strong, you will be in spiritual fitness, in health. You will be productive like **a watered garden,** a fertile place where your work produces fruit! And this comes from believing on Jesus! This becomes the foundation upon which the present depends and the future is built—brick by brick, day by day, hour by hour!

Amen