

**August 21, 2016**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - "The Fourth Commandment"**

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Today's gospel reading is one of those that provide a strong visual image of Jesus' interaction with someone.

"A woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years...bent over and unable to stand up straight."

Have you ever felt like that?

Bent over from the burden of carrying whatever it is that troubles you, whether spiritual or physical – unable to stand up straight and face the world.

I have.

And you know what – Jesus came along and healed my spirit.

I might not have actually seen Jesus, but many times in my life when I have felt burdened God has sent someone to help me stand up.

Sometimes I am given the opportunity to be that helper for someone else.

Sometimes I get to give the gift of healing an evil spirit or a broken heart.

Sometimes God sends me to be the one who notices the woman in the crowd, to reach out a hand, to remind someone that God's power far exceeds our own.

Sometimes God sends you.

And you know what else – God doesn't really care what day of the week that happens.

The fourth commandment tells us to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

The synagogue leader in today's reading interpreted that to mean that no physical work was to be done on the Sabbath.

Jesus interpreted it to mean that on that day your actions should have a holy intent.

What better way to honor God than giving love to someone who needs it?

According to Author Marva Dawn

"Sabbath ceasing means to cease not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation, and finally, from the humdrum and meaninglessness that result when life is pursued without the Lord at the center of it all."

The ancient Hebrew idea of Sabbath goes beyond the day of rest. Out of the Sabbath day flowed the Sabbath year – an entire year of rest for people, animals and the land.

Then, out of this flowed the Jubilee – the celebration of the fiftieth year in which everyone and everything rested, and in which debts were cancelled, slaves were freed, and all land was returned to its original owners.

The whole idea of rest in the Scriptures is tied into this system that ensured that no one was exploited or overworked and nothing was abused or turned into a wasteland through over use.

Can you imagine if we all took a collective sigh and pushed the ‘reset’ button?

For this kind of rest to happen, we need to trust in God’s wisdom, God’s provision, and the mutual care of all of God’s creation.

Unless we can trust that we will be sustained, we cannot rest.

If we believe that our wellbeing is entirely in our own hands, we cannot rest.

If we are afraid that someone else will come and take what is ours we cannot rest.

If we are to find rest – for ourselves and for those around us – we will need to learn to embrace God’s ways of simplicity, service and sacrifice.

This trusting God is not easy.

It is an active spiritual discipline.

Henri Nouwen said “When we enter into solitude to be with God alone, we quickly discover how dependent we are. Without the many distractions of our daily lives, we feel anxious and tense. When nobody speaks to us, calls on us, or needs our help, we start feeling like nobodies. Then we begin wondering whether we are useful, valuable, and significant. Our tendency is to leave this fearful solitude quickly and get busy again to reassure ourselves that we are "somebodies." But that is a temptation, because what makes us somebodies is not other people's responses to us but God's eternal love for us.

To claim the truth of ourselves we have to cling to our God in solitude as to the One who makes us who we are.”

This is a discipline to pursue with intentionality.

Are you able to do that?

Being still, being alone with your thoughts and feelings is one of the most effective ways to sense the divine.

If you are always running around, too busy to notice anyone else, too hurried to listen deeply to anyone, you are living an empty, God-less life.

I don’t mean to be harsh, but I do think that we have lost sight of this important commandment.

I am afraid that we have forgotten how to be holy.

I wonder what you would do to create a holy day?

What sort of activities would you cease?

More importantly, how would you consecrate a day – what would make it holy?

I think a holy day is a day where nothing negative is said-

Your lips refrain from any belittling or condemnation.

The psalmist prays *Set a watch before my mouth, O Lord, and guard the door of my lips, let not my heart incline to any evil thing.*

I think a holy day is one where your heart is free from judgment.

I think a holy day is one where you do something nice for another person with no expectation of a reward.

I think a holy day is when you feel overwhelmed with gratitude for the blessings in your life and the amazing gift of faith.

I also think that you can make any day a Sabbath – any day can be holy – you can actually live a completely holy life if you so choose!

I got a disturbing chart in the mail this week from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

It was a map of ‘Active Hate Groups’ operating in the United States.

Eight hundred ninety two hate groups were indicated, along with 998 antigovernment groups, operating in all 50 states.

Connecticut had just one on record – the Ku Klux Klan.

Friends, we spend inordinate amounts of time and energy worrying about foreign terrorists and tainted immigrants when our own country has seen a monumental surge in the existence of these groups: from 158 in 2001 to a high of 1,360 in 2012 to the 892 we see today.

What is going on?

Is this who we are?

Is this who we want to be?

Is this the world we want to leave to Charlie, who we just blessed?

I think that we need to pay attention to God when we are told to honor a Sabbath day.

We need to stop once in awhile and reflect on how holy we are – or are not and you can only do that for yourself.

You are the only one who can examine your heart and your mind to know whether you are holy.

Only you and God truly know who you are.

You need to do this alone which is not easy in our world today.

Earlier this week I had a conversation about how fear is permeating our culture.

We are exposed to daily doses of shouting, name-calling, bigotry, violence and war.

It seems that many of the unwritten rules of civility and common sense have been abandoned in the public square these days.

Disrespect for authority, whether police, teachers, or elected officials seems to be eroding part of our moral fabric.

Even the Olympics which have always been a celebration of the best a person can be have become tainted with cheating and lying.

We are so afraid of coming in second that cheating and lying have come commonplace.

All of this has an impact on us.

We are anxious.

We are afraid.

We are short-tempered when we would least expect it.

My friends, the antidote to this type of fear mongering is hope.

And faith.

Jesus was sent by God to show us the way.

John's gospel proclaims Jesus as 'the way, the truth and the life.'

As followers of Jesus we are called to follow that way – the way of peace, compassion and holiness;

We are called to live the truth as given to us in the scriptures and to embrace the life that we have been given as a gift from a loving God.

I pray that you will find holiness in your life and that you will seek sabbath time in your world.