

Gather and Rest

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church, UCC - Brunswick, ME

Sunday June 3, 2018

Scripture: *Mark 2:23-2:28*

Introduction to the Scripture

Today, we'll read a story from the early days of Jesus's ministry with his disciples. They are hungry and happy together. On a day that I imagine wasn't too different from today. And they, like we, find way to pass the time together... reveling in friendship and food.

Sermon

I can't help myself but have a little graduation sermon for us this time of year. Partly, because we are lucky to have high school and college seniors hanging around, but also when we step into new seasons, there are always a bunch of us graduating into something. New work, new lack of work, new challenges, new joys. So even if you aren't draping yourself in black polyester in the summer sun... play a little commencement march for yourself.

I love this tiny story of Jesus and his friends in love with the day and each other. Walking through a field, picking grain as they go and as they talk—probably as a bunch of fisherfolk do: stories told, stories inflated, and lovingly, laughingly deflated.

They settle by the side of a road,
eat with dirty hands smelling of dust and wheat.

You can bring this story home with you.

Think here of the day spent picking strawberries or later blueberries...
the day where more fruit ends up in your belly than in your basket.

The sun in your eyes, the conversation weaving in and out as you cross rows
with your friends, picking.

And then you sit. You eat.

And everything is breeze and heat and fullness.

Of course, there is always a Pharisee.

There is always someone in our world
watching over time.

The *day* is Holy, they assure us.
You cannot pick.
You cannot have this feast.
You are out of time, and out of line.

I love this story because it is summer, a quiet time between. And it is good that Jesus knew what that was about. Jesus was all about time off, as it turns out.

Because we have graduates today, and summer is coming for you.
Fall, too, and all the rest, and on and on again the wheel will turn.

But I want to lead you to this summer as you graduate, because like good disciples you are headed off on an adventure, but this summer is still yours. A time between to enjoy all you are, and not so much all you have to do.

We have remarkable people here in this room... with remarkable gifts and talents.
Graduates, you do so much: you are thinkers, servant leaders, athletes, musicians (Good God, are you musicians).

But I want to insist today that all those things you do have little to nothing to do with why God, and families and friends who you claim for yourself, and we here think you are amazing.

Don't get me wrong, those things you do so well, with so much commitment, passion, practice, and skill show us something about you: your heart, your giving, your playfulness, your creativity. But your activities are not the measure of those things, they are just a window into them.

Here's a bit of theological physics: holiness is conserved, whether at rest or in motion.

There are lots of places in the world that will all too easily try and break this rule: they will insist that your worth is based on how much work and how hard you work and how fast you work.

The pharisees in Jesus time want to hold up the Sabbath—ironically—as another thing that we humans have to *do*: an activity to try and make ourselves more acceptable to God, a thing they are sure has a right and a wrong way to do it.

Jesus insists today and forever that we don't mark time to make ourselves holy, we are holy

and we mark time to celebrate it. That's why the sabbath is a commandment, not so that we would make 24 hours more holy than any other, but that we would take a whole 24 hours to remind ourselves how blessed we and everything in this world is. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus concludes his teaching in this story by saying... "something greater than the temple is here." This is the highest ritual we have: to dearly love our friends and give our time to that love.

You are all headed into challenging times:

You have probably heard the older folks around you talk about anxiety. You may have even heard we have statistics that college age folk—in and out of college—are part of the swelling ranks of people overwhelmed by the world around us and all that it asks of us.

I want you to know that it's not you, you've just inherited what we made. I see it as an admissions interviewer for my college... I see it in your resumes, which are sometimes longer than mine. In how hard you work. On how high the stakes seem. I want you to know that if you ever feel overwhelmed to the point that it feels like too much for you, you have the right to stop, wave your hands, and say to people who love you... I need to sit and eat with you, and I need your help.

Before that, though: this summer. Like Jesus and the disciples. Stop. Eat with friends. Because, if we lose ourselves in whatever work we feel called to so much that we never stop, eventually we will lose what we are working *for*.

Remember that time to play, to eat with friends, to revel in the day together, to experience the luxury of what is truly a holy waste of time, is a part of how we all remind ourselves that we are holy just as much at rest as at motion, at work as at play.

It also how we bless each other on the ways of life when we part. In a culture that is really pretty awful at saying good-bye, remember to take the time to give thanks and blessing to those people you may be parting from.

Remember also that we all need this time to be fed to dream the next steps forward. It helps us see the new way forward, just like disciples who found themselves following a path they couldn't imagine with Jesus. Remember that almost no adult you can think of is living the 1st draft of their lives. Remember that without time to reflect, without imagination, without playful thought and possibility, First Parish wouldn't have pastors but a math teacher and, yes, an electronics Retail and Service Repair Operations Manager. And thanks be to God, someone else had the time to dream their way to the head of a math classroom, and maybe even into a Corporate Training seminar where, I trust, they have

found the who and how of themselves.

Remember the sabbath... but not as test for yourself. We mark time. We gather, feed each other, and rest. We do all these things because they energize and equip us to go out into the world and do this wonderful work that we have been given to do: to seek justice, kindness, humbleness... We also do these things, though, because we *are a wonderful work*.

You are wondrous just there in your being. Worthy of being fed holy food. Worthy of holy time. At rest. At motion.

Take. Time. Amen.