

GENESIS SERMON
6 November 2005

May my lips be blessed to speak so that all may hear
God's word. A M E N.

Well, I woke up Sunday morning

With no way to hold my head that didn't hurt.

And the beer I had for breakfast wasn't bad,

So I had one more for dessert.

Then I walked across the street

And caught the Sunday smell of someone frying

chicken.

And Lord it took me back to something that I'd lost

Somewhere, somehow along the way.

And I stopped beside a Sunday school

And listened to the songs that they were singing.

Then I headed down the street,

And somewhere far away a lonely bell was ringing,

On a Sunday morning sidewalk,

I'm wishing, Lord, that I was stoned.

'Cause there's something in a Sunday

That makes a body feel alone.

And there's nothing short a' dying
That's half as lonesome as the sound
Of the sleeping city sidewalk
And Sunday morning coming down.

Johnny Cash, the man who sang those
words, knew Sunday . . . and was tormented by it:
that day of rest . . . with people talking to God . . .
united in worship . . . families together . . . celebrating
the creativity of all that has been given, all that is.

While he knew only the loneliness of a lost soul.

Jogged memories, found in the smells of Sunday chicken, and church bells and Sunday School classes: days when life had meaning, purpose, a future . . . echoed memories of a childhood when Sunday was truly a day of rest . . . rest from the cares of the world and regeneration in the knowledge of God.

But times change and now the day once set aside for praise and contemplation has become awash in the torment of lost opportunities and dreams, the greatest tragedy . . . the nothingness of all his tomorrows.

Yet this lonely soul used his God-given gift of creation to write these lines . . . more prayer than lyrics. The “coming down” of Sunday morning was for him withdrawal from the drugs and booze that shielded him from reality as he jammed his life away with other lost souls.

For us, it is our high-stressed living of bills and crying babies, overdue papers and illness, bosses and mortgages . . . but our Sunday coming down to earth, is cushioned and renewed as our eyes look up to our God.

Sunday morning . . . time set apart to come down to the basic core of Christianity, to rest, reflect on

God's gifts, what one has been saved from and what has been taken from us, the burdens we no longer endure alone.

You know, when the story of creation is told the concentration is usually on the incredible activity of the making of "things" ascribed to the first six days.

In fact, almost inevitably when I mention the "seven days of creation", someone rushes to point out that creation only took six days. Now those six days are VERY impressive: in them God made, from a void of nothingness, light, and heavens, animals and fish, seas and land, birds and plants and humankind.

But creation DID take seven days . . . NOT SIX.

On that seventh day, that day that God set apart and made so special, on that day God created rest . . . so that we too could appreciate all creation and rest from our work and be with our God. In Genesis God,

“blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made”¹

and in the Ten Commandments, He proclaimed,

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do ANY work . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea,

¹ Genesis 2:3

and all that is in them, and HE rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”²

When you consider the complexity and perfection of creation, you know God makes no mistakes in design. And when God created the world wonderful rhythms came into being:

- the calm, the storms and the tides of the sea;
- the promise of Spring blossoms and showers
... the hot, lazy summer days ... falling
leaves and harvest ... the long season of
our sleeping, frozen lands;
- the seven ages of humanity, AND
- the seven day-ed week.

² Exodus 20:8-11

Each division and pattern uniquely crafted to provide activity and rest so that the cycle of creation will continue to blossom and flourish.

But what has happened to that 7th day in our 21st century?



Last Monday my mother turned 100, and during her lifetime Sundays have changed radically. As a child, she remembers Sundays set aside solely for worship, Bible reading and Church: no stores were open, no public entertainment took place. It was a day for God and rest and family.

When I was a child the church assumed the responsibility for teaching children about their faith so Sunday mornings remained set aside for church and evenings for the family dinner.

By the time my children were attending Sunday School, movies and sports and shopping occupied their afternoon: and the day of rest and togetherness disappeared for most families.

To-day, my grandchildren are faced with an even stranger world: they face the choice of missing their age group's hockey, baseball and football games, organized by OUR city, running in direct competition with church and Sunday School.

Sunday mornings have become the time for grocery shopping, kiddies' sports, washing the car and . . . sleeping in. Empty pews and empty Sunday school classrooms, bear witness to this reality.

Why does my Mother mourn these changes?

What difference does it make?

Does God really care about all of this?

Well, to start with, we really don't have a choice. God's directives can be ignored, but it's not a smart move. Imperiling our souls is just plain dumb: but on

simple practical grounds, emotionally and physically
it's just not good for us either!

It is not that we WANT a day off work – although
that is nice. **What we need is a day that is
different** from the other six . . . a day in which we turn
our backs on the treadmill . . . a day when the family
spends time together and shares a meal around the
table . . . a day of common prayer and childhood's
hymns . . . a day in which we contemplate and
consider God's creation and our own.

. . . a day when the infinite smallness of each
individual's reality, is placed into perspective beside
the almighty, eternal, glory of God.

And that's why we NEED Sunday: time to sit back, time for ourselves, time for others, time for GOD, time set aside for the wonder of being and of being one with God.

God knew what He was about when he gave us this day of rest . . . this last great gift of creation.

We need to simplify our lives, to step back and find out what REALLY is important, to examine our priorities, to consider our options, to pray, to open our Bibles, to turn problems over to God, to remember all that we have received, to make time for our families, to take a walk, to read a story, to really listen to what our husband or wife, or child is saying and, even more, what God has to say to us.

Our lives are so busy. There are so many deadlines . . . so many demands on our time. We have children and parents and partners and bosses, school and work, appointments and shopping, meals to cook and missed vacations, undone laundry and meetings to attend. And, should there be a few moments left unaccounted for, well, there are endless programmes on TV to fill those that remain.

You know . . . that's not what life is all about. Those are the priorities that leave you barren and lonely even in a crowd. They produce the Sunday morning void that Johnny Cash sang about . . . and it's not just the drug addict, the boozier or the workaholic whose life spins out of control in

confusion: you and I can suffer from that despair as well.

But in God's wisdom He made that final gift of a time to rest . . . sanctified the rightness of not working one day each week.

Resting **IS** doing something.

Appreciating all the wonders of the world which God created **IS** doing something.

Seeing with new eyes the riches of being with family and friends **IS** doing something.

Appreciating the creativity in your own life and in the works of others **IS** doing something.

Dreaming of all you can be, **IS LIVING** in obedience to God's commandment and in accord with the rhythms of the life that He created.

When you go home to-day, take with you the leaflet with the words of that song and tack it on your fridge to remind you. And then, over lunch plan an afternoon with God, and ignore the dictates of a world that demands every waking moment be filled with doing or striving or fighting or demanding or plotting or toiling or just plain dithering!

Just put your feet up. Don't turn on the TV. Don't pick up a book. Don't start lists of all that needs doing . . . and don't do any of those chores, either.

This IS Sunday. This **IS** the day of rest that God gave us. Use it well. Spend some of it lavishly getting to know God better. Spend some of it generously with people you love. Spend some of it, on you alone. Spend some just daydreaming, enjoying the creativity which God gave you.

I utterly guarantee this to be the best investment you can make for each new week: your spirit recharged, your soul on the right track and God in your heart.

Each Sunday we lift our voices in prayer for peace in our troubled world. Let us first seek peace of mind, and the grace of God in this, our Sunday morning, coming down and looking up. **A M E N.**