

Sacred Saturday
Mark 2:23-3:5

What we name sacred holds power.

If you grew up in a New England Congregational church, then an intellectual exposition of Biblical text might be your preferred path to knowing God.

If you were raised in a highly liturgical Roman Catholic or Episcopal church, then chanting the familiar words of generations might be your meditative means for encountering Christ.

If you grew up in a lively Southern Baptist church, then shouting over the pastor's preaching might, for you, proclaim the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

What we name sacred holds power.

In that same New England Congregational church, stained glass and altar cloths and clergy wearing robes might be appalling.

In that same liturgical Catholic or Episcopal church, changing the failure words at the Communion table might be shocking or upsetting.

In that same lively Southern Baptist church, reading a prepared sermon could be the sign of one unmoved by God's true presence.

What we name sacred holds power.

Hundreds of years of religious law and holy rule are what Jesus faced in confronting the attitudes around the Sabbath.

He wasn't just looking at the possibility that people might walk out of his church because folks didn't like his sermons.

Jesus was taking the holiest, most sacred day of the Jewish year... and changing it.

The Sabbath. The highest of High Holy Days. Holier than Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur even¹.

The Sabbath. Ordained by God in the very beginning as a remembrance of the Holy.

The Sabbath. The piece of ritual that held the Israelites together as the people of YHWH even in their exile from the land and from the Temple.

The Sabbath. So sacred – and yet Jesus touched it.

Profaned it, the Pharisees might say. Took away its holiness.

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There are some things that we simply view as sacred.

If I drop a piece of Communion bread, I want to make sure that it's disposed of with care – not just tossed out with the trash.

Some of us can't compromise the words of the Lord's Prayer – they must remain as we've been taught.

A few people don't want a sanctuary used for anything other than worship – no recitals or lectures that aren't spiritually focused.

When I was young I was taught that, if I were making a pile, I could place NO BOOK on top of the Bible ... it was too sacred. I eventually discovered that this rule caused a problem when I was making a pile of Bibles.

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Consider the objects or places that you would name *sacred*.

Think about the *holy* that you have encountered.

How many instances do you come up with?

Last week during worship we listed on post-it notes some of the things we are most grateful for in our lives. Those post-its are now hanging on a sliding glass door in the fellowship hall – and I encourage you to glance through them.

As I read what you shared, I noted how many of us indicated our loved ones, our health.

After we made these offerings,
bringing them forward to the Communion Table,
we consecrated them.

Consecrate.

To consecrate means to make sacred... to make holy.

For those of you who wrote your children or spouse –

is it *possible* that they are *holy*?

For those of you who wrote good health –

is it *possible* that your health is *sacred*?

Did you think of *either* of these just a minute ago when I asked you to consider what you would name sacred?

Let me step back a bit.

I would venture that a number of folks might say that we encounter the sacred through prayer, worship or meditation.

Prayer in the form of familiar recitation can be comforting,
and we experience God or the Holy in that comfort.

Worship as an expression of praise can catch us up,
and we experience the Divine in that emotion.

Meditation as a means of letting go and fully entering
self in spirit can provide insight or peace,
and we experience the Oneness in that wisdom.

Most of us would agree that these forms of prayer are sacred.

And yet I know many (myself among them) who subscribe to the theory that “every moment can be prayer”. *Every moment.*

Driving down the highway,
washing dishes,
working out,

your job (*whatever* you do)...

it is a prayer if we do it with intention,

if we recognize it is a part of God’s world created “good”
and treated so.

Can it be?

Through millennia we have been handed down this concept of dualism – life is divided into two realms:
good-bad, light-dark, heaven-hell, spirit-body, sacred-profane.

It’s much easier to live in this 2-possibility world than in multiple possibilities.

It’s how we think as children, and it’s one of the reasons our earliest stories are about

the noble prince slaying the evil dragon or the good children defeating the wicked witch.

Our senses understand that there are dawn and dusk between night and day;
 and that clouds make the light less or stars and moon brighten the darkness.
 Yet we are more comfortable thinking about one or the other – so we continue separating creation into
 what is holy and what is worldly.

Sabbath is holy; work is worldly.

Speaking of this dichotomy in his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, historian and philosopher of comparative religion Mircea Eliade proposes that God or the sacred can manifest itself in anything:

a sunset, a tree, a book – any earthly experience.

We don't worship the experience, he states, but we come to know the God revealed in it.

I have known those moments, and I'm sure you have too.

And yet, Eliade defines the sacred as “*the opposite of the profane*”.²

The opposite. There is nothing of the profane in the sacred. There is nothing of the ordinary in the holy.
 It's still duality, separation... and I believe that separation is not possible.

For Christians, the ultimate manifestation of the sacred within the profane is Jesus Christ.

In this co-mingling we have the cosmic Christ –

the spark of God which *is* the Sacred –

enter fully into the human form of the man Jesus.

The human is NOT the opposite of the holy.

This manifestation of the sacred, this oneness between the Divine Being and the human being, is a
 breaking of barriers.

This merging of Jesus with Christ-ness reveals the *impossibility* of such duality.

In *Jesus/Christ* we have the sacred at every moment,

not just manifesting so we might have a glimpse of glory,

one epiphany experience that keeps us able to slog along in our humdrum mundane lives!

The Divine is present in the everyday,

not only in “special” experiences.

The Sabbath is God's holy day.

The sacred revealed in time – sunset to sunset.

And yet Jesus broke the Sabbath laws. Why?

Because God –

the Sacred, the Holy –

is NOT only revealed in one instance, in one time and place ...

but always.

God is revealed in the disciples picking and eating wheat.

God is revealed in the healing of a withered hand and in wholeness.

In work, in food, in body, in family, in *all*.

We come to worship on Sundays – the day we have chosen as holy. And yet on Saturday, when we're at
 ball games or

doing laundry, or

at parties or

grocery shopping or

anywhere ...

where we are, in all we do, God is present,
 the sacred is manifest
 if we choose to experience it,
 to live it.

Jesus broke the rules between sacred and profane.
 He broke the Sabbath,
 he broke the fast,
 he broke kosher laws.
 He sat with tax collectors and
 Samaritans and
 Gentiles and
 prostitutes –
 he seems to have gone to all the best parties!

But in knowing and living and maintaining that ALL is holy,
he shared his message in such a way that lives were changed.

WE are called to be like Christ.
 We are called to experience and share the sacred in everything and everyone...
 To view Saturday night as Sunday morning and vice versa.

So ENJOY friends and health and parties and good things!
 Enjoy them intentionally,
 recognizing them as encounters with the sacred.

The Sabbath was made for us, Jesus insists, not we for the Sabbath.
 God has given us the Holy to do with it what we will.
 Can we pray without ceasing, as Paul instructs,
 making every moment a prayer acknowledging the sacred?

As theologian and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel affirmed:
 “Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy”.

May we know it so. Amen.

¹ In his *The Sabbath: Its Meaning For Modern Man*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel posits the thesis that Judaism is a religion of time, not space, and the Sabbath symbolizes the sanctification of time.

² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, p. 10.

Benediction:

May all your Saturday Nights be as Sunday Morning. And may all your Sunday Mornings be as Saturday Night. And may you carry BOTH with you throughout the week. Go in peace.