

Summer is arriving in Florida. What is the favorite thing you like to do in the summer months. One of you might say: Golf. Early in the morning or late in the day. Regular courses outside the villages have bargain, basement prices. "I remember playing 18 holes of golf with a cart for \$12.00 bucks, what a deal". Another of you would say, Water Volleyball. So much fun being in cool water, and playing a competitive sport. If you were to ask me, what I like to do best in the summer, it would be lap swimming. So relaxing and so good for the heart. When I was a kid, I occasionally went to a public pool in Saginaw Michigan, called Anderson pool. It had a water slide, and a great high diving board. But if you ask me, what I didn't like about Anderson pool, it would be the lifeguards and all the rules. 1) If you were caught running you had to sit out of the pool on the bleachers for 15 minutes 2) Only one person could be on the waterslide ladder at a time. 3) No diving off the side of the pool in the shallow end 4) No having a buddy on your back and playing war against another 2some team. That's the one thing, I didn't like about Anderson pool. It was all the rules, all the laws.

It's true. Whether at the pool or driving down the highway we don't like to be told what we can and cannot do. Yet in our study today we're going to learn that rules, especially God's rules, are for our benefit. Just as lifeguards don't enforce rules because they like to make life miserable for little boys and girls, God did not give us his rules just to show us who's boss. His laws are not about control and domination. Jesus makes that clear in our Gospel lesson this morning so let's turn to it now and find out why we want to "Thank God for his Rules".

In our text Jesus and his disciples were walking through a grain field with the Pharisees on their heels. The Pharisees, members of a fanatic religious group, weren't there to learn from Jesus but to spy on him. They wanted to find Jesus doing or saying something that would expose him as the fraud they thought he was. The Pharisees thought they had found their evidence when they observed Jesus' disciples stripping grain from the field and popping the kernels into their mouth as they walked. The Pharisees weren't about to accuse Jesus' disciples of stealing because in his instructions to Moses, God had allowed his people to go into a neighbour's field and pluck a few stalks of grain to eat (Deuteronomy 23:25). No, what made the Pharisees think they had a case against Jesus was that he had allowed his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, the day of rest.

Now God had commanded his Old Testament people not to work on the Sabbath (Saturday), but the Pharisees had added their own rules, 619 of them to be exact, to God's original command. In doing so the Pharisees missed the whole point of the commandments. They thought the purpose of the commandments was God's way of seeing whether or not his people really loved him. Certainly God gives us his rules to be obeyed, but the reason he wants his commands obeyed is because they really do make life better for us. That's what Jesus meant when he said: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Like a boss who really cares about his employees and so will order them to take vacation, not just suggest it, with the 3rd Commandment God ordered his people to rest once a week so they would be refreshed.

There is of course more to the 3rd Commandment than not working once a week and we'll get to it in a just a minute but for now consider how all of God's rules are meant to be a blessing. Take the 6th Commandment for example. God forbids adultery because he wants peace and love to abound in families. God forbids murder with the 5th Commandment so that we don't

have to live in constant fear of losing our lives. With the 8th Commandment God forbids bearing false witness because he wants to protect reputations. Analyze any of God's rules and you will see that God gave them for our good – not to make life difficult.

Because the Pharisees thought that God's commands were simply there to be obeyed, they became legalists. They were more concerned about the laws than the people for whom those laws had been made. This showed in the Pharisees' attitude towards the disciples who were plucking grain on the Sabbath. They didn't care that the disciples were hungry; they were only concerned that by plucking grain, the disciples, as the Pharisees saw it, were harvesting and were therefore guilty of breaking the 3rd Commandment because they were "working" on the Sabbath.

To show the Pharisees that the law of love (concern for others) is to supersede all other laws, Jesus spoke about an incident from David's life (Mark 2:25, 26a). One time when David and his men were on the run from King Saul, they stopped in on the high priest and asked him for something to eat (1 Samuel 21). The only thing the high priest had on hand was the bread from the tabernacle – a tent like structure that served a bit like a church. This bread, however, was special bread and was only to be eaten by the priests. Although the high priest technically broke God's law by giving David the tabernacle bread, the law of love, concern for David and his men, superseded all other laws.

So does this mean that we can turn a blind eye to God's rules in the name of love? Should we just ignore people who are living contrary to God's Word because judging them would only make us guilty of what the Pharisees did in our text? Not at all! God's laws are not flexible in the sense that if we don't like them, we can bend them to fit our life-style. In love we are to call those who live contrary to God's Word to repentance. We do this because those who ignore God's rules are not only rebelling against a God who made and loves them, they are hurting themselves and the people around them. For example children who disobey their parents not only hurt their parents but also themselves because they are ignoring the years of wisdom and experience their parents have to offer them to keep their children from making the same mistakes they did growing up.

Of course as we call one another to repentance we will always want to remember why we do it. We do it because we are concerned, not because we think that we are better, as the Pharisees often thought when pointing out the sins of others. For example when we practice close(d) communion and ask people to wait and be instructed before receiving the Lord's Supper it should be because we don't want them to receive Christ's body and blood in ignorance and therefore to their harm (1 Corinthians 11:29), not because we have a rule in our church constitution that needs to be enforced.

But now why is it that we seemingly ignore the 3rd Commandment when we just got done saying that God's commands are not to be bent? Why don't we continue to rest on the Sabbath (Saturday) as the Old Testament believers were supposed to do? The reason we don't continue to observe the Sabbath as the people of the Old Testament did is because the purpose of this command was to point ahead to the coming of Jesus and the rest he would bring from our sins. Jesus came. He brought us rest from our sins through his death on the cross that paid the debt of our sins – just as someone paying the rest of your mortgage would bring you financial rest. Therefore there is now no need to keep obeying the 3rd Commandment as it pertains to what we do or don't do on the Sabbath Day. Paul put it this way: "Therefore do not let anyone

judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival...or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:16, 17)

The spirit of the 3rd Commandment, however, is still valid. Remember I said that there was more to the Sabbath Day than not working? God's people were to rest from their work so they could devote themselves to the study of God's Word. God says there is still a need for us to come and worship on a regular basis (Hebrews 10:25). He doesn't tell us when that day should be. In Christian freedom we can worship on any day of the week we would like but we are to gather for worship on a regular basis. Don't think that this is just another one of God's commands - something he demands of us to see if we really love him. Remember, God's commands are for our good. When God urges us to worship it's like receiving a standing invitation to a Friday night banquet a rich uncle always puts on. We would go to such an event, not because we feel obligated to, but because we know we'll benefit from it! In fact we'd be crazy not to go. In the same way we come to worship not because we have to but because we benefit from the Word and Sacrament offered here. Here God feeds us his forgiveness and comfort strengthening us for the week ahead.

I don't know what you have planned for the rest of the day but it looks like a great day for the pool. If you go swimming only to be yelled at by a lifeguard or pool monitor for breaking pool rules, don't become grouchy - be thankful. Be thankful that there are those who make and enforce rules to keep us from hurting others and ourselves. That's also why God gave us his rules. Show your thanks for those rules by obeying them and by showing love for those around you. Amen.