

I suspect there may be some, perhaps most, of you who have mixed feelings about our monthly celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the *Eucharist*, not because you do not appreciate the Sacrament, but because some of the Sunday's we celebrate it our service runs over the self-imposed 60 minutes that I try to follow as our maximum — and please do not ask me why I blindly follow that tradition on the Sundays lacking the pressure of “get-me-home-in-time-for-the-Cardinals-or-Packers-kick-off!”

No matter; I am not complaining; the truth is, none here has ever complained to me about the length of our service, but I do suspect there is anticipation that, “Soon we can go to fellowship downstairs.”

And I understand; while it is too early in the day for me to eat much (other than chocolate-laced cookies or desert), Laura and those who help her provide some pretty substantial spreads for those who wish to partake — though I'll make a pitch for tossing a dollar or two or five into the basket to help bear the expense.

Porking-out on the Sabbath, and I deliberately chose that term just to note that observance of the Sabbath originated with our Hebrew ancestors, for whom pork certainly was not part of the meal they ate once the Sabbath ended; “porking-out” on the Sabbath is definitely not an ancient Hebrew tradition.

Observance of the Fourth Commandment prohibition of work on the Sabbath was, as I recently read, so rigid for some “schools” of Jews in what we would call the “first century of the common era,” that not only was eating on the Sabbath to be avoided, but even expelling one's bodily waste was to be avoided, though I cannot quite imagine that.

But eating on the Sabbath was more easily avoided, though the story of David and his soldiers told by Jesus was probably more concerned with the picking of corn, clearly work, than with eating, but bear with me.

Bear with me, because Jesus was clearly saying something beyond, “Be reasonable about what ‘do not labor on the Sabbath’ means.” For even though, as I pointed out earlier, the explanations offered as to *why* not to labor vary between the two statements of this fourth of The Ten Commandments, the Commandment not to labor was taken very, very seriously, especially by the school known to us as “The Pharisees,” who are portrayed as Jesus’ greatest opponents among the Jews, yet not in a way that over-looks that they were zealous in wishing to follow the Jewish law and read the Commandment very — perhaps *too* — expansively.

And there is an interesting but I think easy to overlook aspect of Jesus’ conduct in today’s reading, as not only do His disciples pick (and eat) corn, but Jesus goes into the synagogue and “a man was there who had a *withered* hand.”

Now, it had previously escaped me in reading this passage, but this clearly was *not* an emergency situation; there is no reason of which we can be aware that Jesus could not have told the man to come to Him the next day rather than for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath. But then we get the kicker, He asked them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

Woops! How can an action of kindness to another conceivably be against the commandment — I hesitated using the word “commandment,” which might have had a different connotation for a Pharisee than for Jesus, — how can an action of kindness to another conceivably be against the Jewish commandment calling for, “Love thy neighbor as thyself”? How could it conceivably be against Jewish law and the Commandments because that loving was done on the Sabbath?

And thus, of course, Jesus puts the Sabbath commandment into a different perspective: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

That actually says two different things, the first of which should give all believers, Jewish or Christian, a real appreciation for the gift of the Ten Commandments: God gave them *for the benefit of humans, that we might live in peace and concord with one another*. Oh, “yes,” the first two commandments as we count them, have to do with our relation with God, “No other God” and, to state simply, “No idolatry,” but all the rest — including not taking the Lord’s name in vain, which really had to do with legal proceedings — all the rest are about how we deal with, how we turn love into action with, one another.

And I think the need for rest on Sabbath had at its core the well-being of humans, in response for which consideration, their — which is to say, *our* — giving thanks to God is appropriate.

But with the benefit of Jesus’ teaching as to “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,” we do not need to look at the Pharisees and their belief that fasting was called for, but rather we need to seek to worship with *thanks*, with *gratitude*, and to realize that *thanks* is expressed in the word used for the Sacrament, *Eucharist*. We need to understand that expression of *gratitude* expressed in the very name of the Sacrament of Eucharist, as we remember that, on the night before He died, He, Jesus, the one who helps us to understand that God wants joy for us and while wanting humility, but who does not ask for *humiliation*, that on this Sabbath we celebrate using as our model for how to act with others the example that, on the night before He died, He dined with His disciples, and whether they had “porked-out” or not, that following the meal, He . . .