

A Merciful Rhythm
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Additional Text: Also, we will remember the theme text for the series, Matt 11:28-30, this time from *The Message*

28–30 Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

Matthew 12:1-14

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. 5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Read Texts

Opening illustration: Vacation Rules

I was talking with a friend about vacations, and she asked me what my "vacation rules" were. I thought, "Isn't the point of vacation to NOT have any rules?" But then I thought about it a little more, thinking about past vacation experiences good and not-so-good, and I realized that I did in fact have some vacation rules.

1. If anyone in the car needs/wants to stop. We stop. No call for needless suffering.
2. No alarm clocks, unless we need to be some place at a certain time.
3. Less is more. The time is for savoring, not cramming.
4. Say yes to a new experience, a scenic detour, a serendipitous opportunity when they appear.

Then my friend said she basically has one rule: Everyone gets a free pass on everything.

My friend is an incredibly disciplined person. She is a very earnest rule follower. So frankly I was surprised by this. So I asked her to elaborate.

She said, “No one can do wrong, which means we don’t argue over anything, or get offended.”

I thought: What an amazing rule. The Vacation Mercy Rule.

Jesus has a debate with the religiously Serious of his day about the Sabbath rules. The Pharisees treated Sabbath as a time for proving how faithful to God you were but carefully following all the rules – no matter what. Jesus reclaims it as part of God’s merciful rhythm, and makes plain that as Lord of the Sabbath he is ushering in whole new world order that has mercy as a guiding value.

So if Matthew is using this story to describe what it will be for those who accept Jesus’ invitation to Come to him, to take his yoke, to learn from him, and to find rest – What should they expect?

They should expect a Lord who looks out for them.

The Pharisees don’t accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath by working. He accuses them of allowing his disciples to do so. In his response, Jesus dives deeply into the idea, the rule, the behaviors that undergird the Sabbath– and then points people to the deeper meaning and purpose – namely freedom. Freedom from burdens, and freedom to relieve burdens of others.

They should expect to live a Scripture-shaped life.

“I want mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6) means I want human sympathy, not superhuman disciplines. People are eclipsed by disciplines in some forms of disciplined Christianity.

Jesus’ teaching is that the God of the Bible is primarily the Kind One rather than primarily

the Demanding One.

Come to me, all you who are working hard = kindness

Take my yoke upon you = Demand

Learn from me, for I am gentle = Kindness

This is the evangelical model.

Using the Bible as a justification for withholding love and care to someone else is NEVER acceptable.

Jesus' final word to the Serious drips with irony: It is biblical on the Sabbath Day to do the right thing.

They should expect People over policy.

This story presents Jesus in his grandeur. With sovereign freedom Jesus exalts himself above three of the realities held dearest by the people of God: The Sabbath Day, the Sanctuary Temple, and the Scriptural Law. A Lord of the Sabbath, he sets the rhythm and the rule. And that is mercy for humans.

Conclusion: Our mission here at West Valley is to "Know Christ and Make Him Known." The Christ we are invited to know is the Lord of the Sabbath, who reflects the Heart of God which is a heart of mercy. To make Christ known, we must be two things: We must be people who are mercy-giving. And to do that, we must be mercy-receiving.

We can't give what we don't got. So this week, notice when God is **offering** you mercy. Notice how hard it is to receive it. Work through that. Then notice when God is calling you **extend** mercy. As you have received it, so give it away!

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