

Service Time Change

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] I forgot what time I started. I don't know how long that went for. But, okay, so short sermon because we want to talk about a potential change that we're going to work on.! So if you can for me, just settle in for a moment while we do this.

This change is, after much prayer and consideration, something that we're going to try. The elders have determined that we need to try to change how we gather as a church.

Because Advent season is quickly approaching, always changes the pace of our meeting anyway. We think that trying this change out will go well during that time.

So during Advent, maybe the Sunday following Christmas, it's that one right before the new year. So four or five weeks of trying a bit of a different format, right?

During that time, we want to assess those changes, maybe make some tweaks to it. And, really importantly, we want to receive feedback from you. Like, how does it go for you?

[1:02] Like, what is the good of it? What do you not like about it? We really would like to hear your thoughts. Advent will begin on December 1st. That's the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

So we have three weeks to communicate this change. We want everybody to be aware of what's going to happen beginning on December 1st for a period of time and maybe beyond.

We'll see. So today, I just want to spend some time kind of setting up the reason for it and then giving you a brief version of the idea. And then in the coming weeks, we'll get more detailed information out to you.

So your brain starts to freak out and you're like, but what about this thing? And I love it when we do this. It's just, I don't wish, wait, okay? We're going to answer those kinds of questions. We really want to, but the undergirding reason needs to be understood, I think, before we get to that spot.

So I'm going to hold out. Like, I'm totally being a tease. I'm not going to tell you what we're going to change until I give you all the reasons. So lock in. Pay attention to what's going on right now. So most of the change, I would say the driving reason for making the change arises from our understanding of the fourth commandment.

[2:09] So Exodus chapter 20, verse 8, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. We would be as a church, those who would suggest that this commandment should still be kept.

It's not to be disregarded. We spent some time a while back asking that. I think we spent two whole Sundays saying, should we keep the fourth commandment? The answer was yes, but how? What are we supposed to do in keeping that?

And I can't quite work all of that out for you this morning, but I want to say a few things about that as I'm setting this up. We find in the New Testament the moving of this day of rest, this Sabbath day, this ceasing day.

Early Christians set themselves apart from Judaism. They met on the first day of the week in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Which occurred on a Sunday.

Acts 20 and verse 7. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart the next day. And he prolonged his speech until midnight. And then poor Eutychus falls out of the window.

[3:14] Right? Acts 20, verse 7. First day of the week. And again, this day came to be known as the Lord's Day. Revelation chapter 1 and verse 10. John says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.

There is evidence that this was the prominent practice of the early church. Ignatius, who was a first century bishop, said Christians no longer observing the Sabbath, but fashioning their lives after the Lord's Day, on which our life also arose in him, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ. And Tertullian, who was a second century theologian, wrote that for Christians, Sunday is a day of joy. And that pagans would not celebrate anything on Sunday for fear they might be mistaken for Christians.

People would think, you're happy on a Sunday? You must be a Christian. So, this is a day meant for remembering. Exodus chapter 20, verse 8.

Remember the Sabbath. The Westminster Larger Catechism in question 121 says, Why is the word remember set in the beginning of the fourth commandment? Two things.

[4:24] Number one, partly because of the great benefit of remembering it. And secondly, partly because we are very ready to forget it. We are such slow learners, and we are so very quick to forget.

Anybody feel like their week is a fray? It just moves at an incredible rate. There's so much going on. The information is flying. The tasks are overwhelming. I do.

I'm a slow learner, and I'm very quick to forget. We are to remember to keep the fourth commandment. To remember. This is a day set apart for the worship of God.

To be gathered together with the church. To learn and to be reminded that we have rest in Christ.

The wicked have no rest. They cannot rest.

Isaiah 57 20 says, But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet. And its waters toss up mire and dirt. You ever feel like the tossing sea?

[5:25] It cannot be quiet. It just tosses stuff up all the time. Beloved, this is not us. This is not us. Jesus says in Matthew 11, 28, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

God modeled this for us in Genesis. Genesis. It's spoken of in Exodus chapter 20, verse 11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and made it holy. In the creation order, God makes these things. And in Genesis 1, verse 4, it says, And God saw that it was good.

And verse 10, and God saw that it was good. And verse 12, and 18, and 20, and 25, and God saw that it was good. And then in Genesis chapter 3, things are not so good anymore. In John chapter 5, in verse 17, Jesus says, My Father is working until now, and I am working.

God has worked and is now working so that we can rest. Martin Luther once said, The spiritual rest, which God particularly intends in this commandment, is this.

[6:44] That we not only cease from our labor and trade, but much more, that we let God alone work in us, and that we do nothing of our own with all our powers.

We need to be reminded that God has finished a task on our behalf. We do not have to work to gain His acceptance. And He has promised to provide for us all that we need.

What a wonderful thing that He has ordered for us, that we would rest, that we would stop from time to time the chaos of our lives. John Calvin is helpful in the answer to the question, Why do we keep the fourth commandment?

He has said that we observe the Lord's day for three reasons. Number one, to depict spiritual rest. We have spiritual rest, and we're to show that.

Number two, to preserve ecclesiastical order, that the church would have a day that it gathers together, that we can know, at least with fair certainty, and barring some emergency, that God's people will be together in a particular place at that time.

[7:55] I think that technology has made us lax in this. And three, to provide relief from our labor. We need physical rest.

I know that I need to be reminded of my humanity. I am a human man, an eternal soul, but I have flesh, and it is frail, and it is failing me at a rapider and more rapid rate.

It is happening ever more. We need to be reminded that we need physical rest. For many, Sundays are not restful days.

Some of you might go, Yeah, we're doing that. A lot of people in the room don't feel that way on a Sunday. It's another day. We do different things on that day, but it's another day that a lot goes on.

There's particular people, I think, in our fellowship that don't tend to feel the day as restful. Just a bunch of servants. We have a bunch of people who show up early and get stuff done. These musicians get here really early, way earlier than most of you got here, hours in advance, because they're all volunteers, and they don't have time during the week.

[9:04] We don't have full-time musician staff, and they get to just hang out and play guitars together. It's not what they do. They work jobs. They go to school. So they show up early on Sunday morning to help, because they love you, and they want to worship God through music, and use their talents to serve you.

But they get here really early. And I watch them try to practice all those songs in a limited amount of time, and not all the time, but often they seem stressed. They don't seem like they're really enjoying trying to pull that off.

The second group, families. Especially families with young children, right? We know that's happening, right?

Everybody heard that going on in the room? This kind of snuck up on us, because when we first started meeting as a church, and having children join us in our time, there were very few children. It really was a different culture in the room at that time. Sam and I have been reflecting on training our boys, and teaching them to be able to do this, and we were able to do it.

[10:11] But we scheduled their naps. When they were little, they napped from 10 to 12. We had them downstairs in a room somewhere, which was not a hard thing to do. The building wasn't super loud, right?

We knew everybody that was here. There were lots of places where Sam could go tuck in and away if she needed to feed a baby, or do something with the baby. It was just a bit different environment in that day.

And most everybody in the room was extremely quiet, right? Because most everybody in the room was an adult, and they understood that. I think it's a little bit harder.

You'll hear the baby sometimes call and answer each other, right? Because the environment is more, it's okay to talk, right? When they hear other babies talking, they think it's okay for them to talk. And it's just a harder road to be able to do that.

And we're noticing it, right? We're seeing it. I think a lot of us are feeling it, right? That it's difficult. It's a challenge. If you were to come to the Lord's Supper gathering and stay all the way to the end of our often long main gathering, you could be here for almost three hours.

[11:15] So if you don't have children, that may not feel anything for you. But even as I say that, I go, oh, that's a long time. That's a chunk of time, that long, long time together.

So we want to help families, right? We want, we think it's a good thing that parents bear the responsibility of training their children, that they're engaged in that, that we're working on having children, see what's important to us as we gather as God's people.

Like, we want them to be participating, right, in the way that they can. But it takes work and it takes time. And moms, we see you. We see that you're working hard at it. We know that you're putting a great deal of effort into this.

And then finally, leaders. Church, you have elders. Most of them work full-time jobs. They've got a lot going on in their week as well.

And they show up and they have responsibilities here. I put myself very last on the list of this because I get paid a salary. I'm full-time for the church. But I'm having a hard time buying the argument that Sunday shouldn't also be a day of rest for me.

[12:19] I love gathering with you guys, but I'd like to do it at a little bit of a different pace. I think it'd be good for me as well to be with you guys and resting in the Lord with you guys.

I don't think that it should be exhausting for me to preach a sermon because I'm just using my gifting for your benefit. And I don't know that it's so much the sermon as it is everything else going on on a Sunday morning.

Some of this is my fault because I don't prepare well. We hear you, Henry. Wait for the changes, buddy. Exclamation point, right?

Some of this is that all of us could be better at preparing for coming together on Sunday. We could learn something from Genesis chapter 1. We see day as evening and morning. The old practice of Sabbath keeping by Jews still in this day and some conservative.

It starts at sundown and goes to sundown, right? Some of you stayed up way too late last night. You're really tired this morning because you didn't get sleep. We can't do anything about that for you.

[13:28] We provide coffee, but that's about the limit of such a thing. I do too many things last minute on Sunday morning. If you're ever here early, you know that I am bouncing around doing all kinds of things.

I should get that done during the week. And I can. I've got time to do it. I just need to do it. Little details, little things like that that just would allow me to settle in a little bit more, be here with everybody, and enjoy this time as we're being reminded of God's goodness to us in Christ.

So what we want to do and what we're thinking toward is making a bit of a schedule change because as a structure, right, the schedule matters, right? It can affect one thing, but there are going to be some things that you're going to need to do too if we're going to do this well together. So we're going to talk about that in the future, but I want to talk in brief about the changes that we're going to make now. So first, we're going to move the Lord's Supper gathering, which starts now at 9.30 to 10 o'clock.

If you're a guest here, we have a Lord's Supper gathering that's for our members or guests of our members that can invite you to come and to partake of that together.

[14:39] We would like for members of our church to begin seeing not two events happening on Sunday morning, but one event happening on Sunday morning that has a break in between it, but to see that carrying that thing holistically, gathering with the church in that way.

So I want to put that forth to you members to really think in those terms. We'll start that at 10 o'clock. It will run just as it has for right at about 30 minutes.

We'll read a Bible text together, hear a brief explanation of this text, pray, sing a song, take the Lord's Supper, and we'll handle matters of member care. For example, this morning, we introduced some new members to our fellowship.

So if you're a member and you're not making it to that time, there's things happening there that you need to be part of, right? It's a family meal, and we want you to be able to participate in it. Following that dismissal from the Lord's Supper gathering, I'm going to spend about 10 minutes with the children for the time we call Aletheia Way.

So we'll just gather down here. I actually think that'll be good for us because I can do it in a much more family worship style like we do at home, like to stop and correct from time to time, which is much harder to do when there's a bunch of people staring at you doing it.

[15:49] So we'll do that right after that for about 10 minutes so the kids will have a time, and then they'll just have some time to be rambunctious, right? To bounce around, work some energy out.

Our main gathering will begin at 11. We're going to work really hard on it starting at 11, right?

Hopefully, if you're a member, you've been here for a while, so you're just ready to go.

That would be really fantastic and wonderful. But we're really, really going to work at that, being diligent to get started at that time because it's good for everybody in that way, and then we're going to work really hard at ending by 12, right?

Not because you guys have to run out and beat people in line for food, right? At the feeding trough, wherever that may be in town. But for the sake of resting, right? That we just go, and we're done, right?

We're going to wrap that up. Hang out. Spend as much time here as you want to in the afternoon. But we're going to try to see if we can be finished in that amount of time. So hear me. Total, if you're family, you're coming, and you've got two hours, right?

[16:53] With a good break in the middle of that. We're hoping that will serve you well. We're also hoping in shortening that time, we're going to work at kind of designing the service better so it carries together well.

We're hoping to get your undivided attention for that hour, right? Rather than like little bits of your attention as different things are changing and happening. We're going to work. I'm going to be

working with Jordan and Reese on picking songs that work well with the text for that Sunday. Carrying your mind along through what God would have us learn together on that Sunday morning. So again, we'll sing. We'll read the Bible. We'll pray. We'll have an offering. We'll hear a sermon, right? But what's going to happen is this change is going to necessitate a bit less music. And we love music here. I know that. But we're going to try to do a bit less music. And, and I think this is going to be the hardest part, shorter sermons. So pray for us as we try a new rhythm of not 45 minutes to an hour, but 30 to 35 minute sermons, right?

[18:00] We're going to maintain the training area across the hall. So there's a chance over there to try to sit with your children and be quiet in a place that you can correct them. And we're going to have childcare downstairs for children under three or for new families that are just totally like, what is happening?

We didn't know to have childcare or just for those super tough days. You got a little one who's three, four years old. We have, you have days where it is just tough. And parents, your children are always welcome, but you got to determine like, can't, can I do this? Is this the thing I should be doing this morning? Or will it be good for me to sit and rest and hear the gospel in this time, right?

The childcare is not going to be a crazy zone, but we're going to provide more activities than we have. We're going to have a lesson. The parents will be made aware of and given some tools to follow up with the kiddos during the week. And we're going to continue to encourage the participation of children in our gatherings.

We're not stopping that, but we're just recognizing that it is a process. We've always known this, but it's been really hard as of late and we want to do as much as we can to help you in that process.

[19:06] So this is the proposal. We're going to give it a shot. I'm not asking for a vote. We're going to try this. But what we are asking for is your prayer as we're considering it, that we just would have wisdom for what we ought to do.

Your patience in the process of it. I don't know. Things might, we've been doing the service the way we've been doing the service for a long time. The rhythm of it feels real natural to me. I think it's going to feel interesting as we come in together.

But we also want your feedback. So please don't hesitate to speak to one of the elders. Give us some feedback. What you like, what you don't like. We want to do what's best for us all as God gives us this wonderful day.

It should be a day that we really enjoy. We enjoy coming together. It's not causing us to crack at the seams. Right? And we would come together, open our Bibles, be reminded of God's goodness to us in Christ, and leave here refreshed, right?

An afternoon that's restful and being prepared for the next week. So that is the aim. That's where we're headed together. I'm going to lead us in a prayer and I want the band to come lead us in some closing songs and we'll be dismissed.

[20:11] So Father, thank you very, very much for today. And I just do pray that you'll give us wisdom as we continue to consider how we can best love each other as we're gathering together as a people.

And we pray this in Christ's name and for his glory. Amen.