



# Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 2 June 2024

## Pentecost 2

**The Rector will preach at St John's  
& Rev Robert Chambers at St Margaret's:-**

At the beginning of what is called "ordinary time" (because the days that follow Trinity Sunday are "ordered") our readings focus on the sabbath. We are reminded that God rested after creating, hallowing rest for all creatures; the sabbath is God's gift and not a constraint.

*"The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." Mark 2:27-28*

### **An illustration to set the scene**

The American theologian Eugene Peterson begins his book, **The Contemplative Pastor**, with an illustration from Herman Melville's classic novel, Moby Dick.

The boat is chasing the whale and all around is a whirl of noise and chaos.

Captain Ahab and his crew are pursuing their quarry with intention and zeal.

But at the centre of this maniacal commotion, one man sits still and quiet.

He is the harpoonist, the one who is charged with shooting the creature.

He will have one opportunity and he must not miss.

So he sits still while everyone else charges around.

He waits, poised.

His most significant moment must come from a place of stillness.

He must act from a point of rest.

Although, ultimately, the quest fails, Peterson notes how stillness is prioritised above busyness.

### **Today's Gospel teaching**

When Jesus and his disciples walk through the cornfields, the disciples pluck the heads of grain.

It's an absent-minded action and we've all probably done something similar: pulled at long stalks of grass as we've walked, or snaffled blackberries from roadside hedges.

What the disciples are doing is, probably, rubbing the heads in their fingers to release the grain and then snacking on nature's bounty.

But the action is threshing – in miniature – and therefore constitutes work.

The religious leaders, keen to spot wrongdoing, point out that by engaging in such work, the disciples are breaking the rules of the sabbath.

They then wait as Jesus enters a synagogue to see whether he will heal a man.

Again, this will constitute work.

The tenth commandment is God's generous gift to the created order.

All creatures, high and low in society and even the working animals, are to rest for one day per week.

This is not about constraining people and confining them to their homes or to doing nothing.

Instead, God gives people, animals, and even the earth, an opportunity to rest, recover, and renew.

Sabbath time is supposed to be nurturing and healing time for everyone, and Jesus reminds his accusers that, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath."

It is a gift from God, and not a rule-bound constraint.

Feeding and healing are entirely in keeping with divine operation.

The religious authorities had created, over time, a series of regulations about what could and could not be done on the sabbath, in order to help people make good judgements.

By the time Jesus was walking around with his disciples, such regulations had become a burden.

The sabbath was supposed to be regenerative and a welcome opportunity to pause and cease from work, but the legalistic codes had the effect of limiting people rather than liberating them from their daily toil.

Jesus, with the authority of the Son of Man, brings his hearers back to the fundamental principle of sabbath – God’s healing and sustaining grace.

### **How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?**

Rest should not be a luxury, yet it can often feel that way.

Or else, it is the reward we allow ourselves for working hard.

And yet, most of us recognise that we work better, make wiser decisions and have fewer arguments with our friends and loved ones, when we are rested.

We find that, like Melville’s harpoonist, we become more attentive and alert when we are still.

Land is more productive if it isn’t over-farmed; seas teem with life when they are not over fished.

Everyone and every created thing needs rest.

Sabbath time, or a significant amount of resting time, is not our reward; it is vital to existence.

As the writer Anne Lamott neatly puts it, “**Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.**”

God is even more generous – offering a whole day.

Rest is not simply inactivity (although doing nothing is good); it is creative in the most meaningful way.

When we tune out of the endless noise of life, we are more likely to hear the voice of God or the whispers of our heart.

We give our attention to something other than the chatter and we delight in life a little more.

We are healed and restored to life.

The religious authorities needed Jesus to remind them of the purpose of the sabbath.

Many of us need reminding of much the same.

*"The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."*

*Mark 2:27-28*

[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)