

**Conversations on**  
**Mark 2:23–3:6**

*Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.*

*Idea!* Watch together “Shabbat Overview” ([bit.ly/2A7BSVW](https://bit.ly/2A7BSVW)), which addresses the importance of Shabbat for Jewish families today.

### WHAT is important to know?

Mark 2:23–28 is linked to Mark 3:1–6 by two major themes: (a) what is permissible (or lawful) to do on the Sabbath; and (b) the relationship of humanity (*anthropos*) to the Sabbath. Mark’s account prepares the way for the early Christian community to establish its distinct identity. The account ends with Jesus at the center of the synagogue, having demonstrated his lordship of the Sabbath, standing with the human whose hand is now restored. The accusers leave and, ironically, immediately demonstrate their own desecration of the Sabbath by plotting with the Herodians to kill Jesus. (*Judith Hoch Wray*)

- ✠ Read Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:8–11; and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What do these passages establish about what is lawful or permissible on the Sabbath? What do they say about the relationship of humankind to the Sabbath?
- ✠ Jesus defended his disciples’ actions by pointing out that King David had also broken the law. Do you think one unlawful act can be justified by another one? Why or why not?

### WHERE is God in these words?

Each element of Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees has to do with basic observances that characterize not only Jewish but also Christian piety: forgiveness of sins; conventions concerning what, when, and with whom we eat; honoring the Sabbath. These are particular ways in which we sanctify time and space. This conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees contrasts religion that hardens hearts with the gospel that opens hearts to the ubiquitous presence of God and gives birth to compassion and joy. (*Wendy Farley*)

- ✠ In your experience, what makes a time or space holy?
- ✠ Do you think Jesus was surprised by the Pharisees’ reaction? Why or why not?
- ✠ Is Jesus’ teaching on the Sabbath more a welcoming word or a chastising word to you? How so?

### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

What was the intention of “Sabbath” in the first place? Here we recall that it was a day of rest directly related to the holiness and the goodness of creation. It also carries the resonance of liberation from captivity and slavery. If Jesus counters the pharisaic objection found in Mark by claiming the Sabbath was made for human beings, not the other way around, then we begin to understand that Jesus is actually calling for liberation and restoration of the meaning of Sabbath. Christ’s authority is greater than any human voice, no matter how pious, no matter how deeply entrenched in religious tradition. (*Don E. Saliers*)

- ✠ What does studying the seriousness of Sabbath in Jesus’ day reveal to you about the value you place on honoring and observing the Sabbath today?
- ✠ In these verses, how does Jesus restore the traditional, biblical understanding of Sabbath?

### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

This passage asks of readers in every age: What are the essential categories of our lives that Jesus threatens? What have we made divine in our lives that should remain mortal and finite? Since the Sabbath is the central focus of conflict in this passage, we should look first at the concept of the Sabbath in our time. As always, there is powerful good news here. At the same time that we are threatened by Jesus, our hearts long for him. Who among us does not want to be freed from our consumer lifestyle that is killing our souls and polluting the earth? This text reminds us that the journey to life goes through the cross, but that the resurrection awaits as well. (*Nibs Stroupe*)

- ✠ What practices of Sabbath do Jesus’ words in Mark 2:27 suggest to you?
- ✠ What are some things that prevent people today from keeping Sabbath time?
- ✠ How could you support one another in creating more Sabbath time in your lives?

*Loving Creator, open our minds and traditions to Jesus’ teachings and practices of Sabbath. Amen.*