A few years ago, I read an article about how a professor at Washington State University and a Story Lab at the University of Vermont (whatever that is) analyzed over 1700 English novels and discovered that all of them had one of six unique plots. Among these plots are rags to riches, riches to rags and the Oedipus plot which contains a fall, a rise and then a fall again. What this suggests is that we humans like telling ourselves certain stories -- we just change the characters and situations. Like a mystery novel, everyone pretty much knows how it is going to go – a murder, an investigation and the revealing of the murderer. No surprises except for maybe who did it. But we also have narratives that exist outside of fiction. And one of those stories that is fairly popular is the David and Goliath narrative where a brave individual stands up to more powerful forces. You hear it in expressions like “speaking truth to power” and in events like today, July Fourth, where we celebrate the scrappy colonists who stood up to the mighty British Empire, telling George III just what he could do with his “large Armies of foreign Mercenaries.” In many ways this narrative is part of being an American, we like to think of ourselves as individuals who do not brainlessly go along with whatever is popular. And this is not a bad thing providing that we are right. God tells Ezekiel to go against the grain today in our Old Testament lesson where we read, “The Lord said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you….I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day.… they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.” The narrative is that the Israelites are screwing up (again) and God is sending Ezekial to tell them to stop it. It is Ezekial against the world or at least against Israel. And this raises the question of whether we are called to be like Ezekiel. That is are there problems in society and our culture that need to be changed? And do these changes require brave individuals standing athwart society yelling stop? In my humble opinion I think there are things that need to change but I also acknowledge that standing up for what is right when what is wrong is quite popular can be a very lonely and even dangerous place to be. Just look what they did to Jesus or Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

For the rest of this sermon what I want to do is work through an example of what acting like Ezekial would look like in our current context. To do that I am going to use something that is pretty clear cut, at least in terms of what the Bible says. And that has to do with the sabbath and keeping it holy. To start this discussion let’s take a little trip back to 1924 and the Paris Olympic Games. For those of you who have seen the movie *Chariots of Fire* you probably know where I am going with this so you can just nod your heads approvingly. For these games a Scottish sprinter by the name of Eric Liddell was scheduled to compete in the 100 meters and was one of the favorites to win. There was a problem however and that problem was that one of the heats for the 100 meters in which Liddell was supposed to compete was to be held on a Sunday. Liddell, a good Presbyterian, refused to run on the sabbath and so he withdrew from the event. I imagine this all sounds foreign to us, the idea that an athlete would not compete on a Sunday especially in something as momentous as the Olympic games. In our day and age athletes seem to have a societal obligation to compete on Sundays otherwise what would we do all Sunday afternoon? Read? Talk to our children? So why did Liddell do it? Why did he think he had a calling higher than running really fast? Here is the answer: the Bible has at least 171 references to the sabbath many of which are very specific about how it works like this one from Leviticus which states, “Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work.” And if you want to dismiss this by saying that it comes from Leviticus which also tells us to, “Examine locusts to make sure they are permitted for consumption” I would point out that this injunction also appears in the groovier parts of the Bible like the Book of Hebrews which states, “So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God.” The Bible and Church tradition are all pretty clear on the idea of keeping one day of the week to rest. And yet we don’t. We treat Sunday just like any other day.

If you have been paying much attention lately you may have noticed that aliens have been in the news a lot. There have been stories about a raft of UFO sightings that the government has made public as well as a report released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on the subject. I have very few opinions about UFOs besides my usual knew jerk skepticism and despite what people may think, Air Force Chaplains do not receive top-secret briefings on Klingon sightings. But I bring this up because I want to do a little thought experiment and here it is: Let’s say there are aliens and that these aliens visit now and then to make observations about planet earth. Now let’s say that before one particular observation flight left the planet Zolton 5 for their trip to earth the aliens were given a briefing about their mission. In this briefing they were told that previous missions had ascertained that Sunday was a day of worship in the United States and that their job was to discover what it was that we worshiped. My guess is that when they got back to Zolton 5 they would happily report that most of our worship involves young children playing with spherical objects and brunch. And in Wisconsin during the colder months worship involves placing a wedge of foam cheese on our heads.

And so, if we are itching to speak truth to power here is an easy place to start – keep the Sabbath holy. It really goes against everything we as a society seem to value. The idea of taking some time to remove ourselves from the needs and concerns of the day to day and focus on the eternal is not something which would be very popular. It would be like Ezekial when he was sent “to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me.” But here is the thing God commands it and furthermore it is kind of nice. I know we have just come out of lockdown and everyone is feeling like they need to shoehorn two years of activity into one year but remember back to those days of lockdown and remember some of the good things. There was something nice in the way it forced us to slow down. Yes of course it was too much – it was too much at home, it was too much time together, it was too much avoiding of other people. But that is the beauty of the sabbath it is only one day a week. We still have six other days. If you remember back to when I started, I said that this was an example of being like Ezekial, but it is not the only thing we. And so, I want to end today by saying that the sabbath does not have to be your mission. There are plenty of other low hanging fruit we could focus on and often that low hanging fruit is in ourselves. Maybe we could pray more, maybe we could take time to read a great spiritual work. There is always a need for an Ezekial to tell us to change and return to God in all things so that we may be his, this day and forevermore.