

Column

Something precious and vital has been lost in American society over the last 50 years. The almost universal custom of keeping one day in seven special, the Lord's Day, has virtually disappeared. Today shops remain open, while churches (at least many in 2020 because of the coronavirus), remain closed.

It was not so when I was growing up; churches were seldom locked and well attended. Once on the way to church in the family station wagon we spied a man mowing his grass. So rare and odd this sight, we turned and stared.

In those days, at least in our community, well over half the population were in church on the Lord's Day. More than that, there were certain prescribed things you did and did not do after the morning service.

Once home you ate lunch, usually a rather large family meal. I understand now why my mother, if the service did not start precisely on time, would look at her watch and say under her breathe, "Let's get the show on the road." No doubt she was thinking of what she had do to get the meal on the table.

After lunch, there was no working in the garden, but you could sit on the porch and read the newspaper or go fishing (that was relaxation, not work).

Sometimes there was a ride in the country. Often we would pass a white, framed church where African-Americans worshiped. In the summertime, the windows would be open with the sound of fervent, heart-filled praise going forth. Invariably, someone in the car would say dryly, "I see Mt. Moriah – or whatever the name of the church was – is still 'holding forth'".

On occasion we would stop at someone's house. The 'visiting' that would follow would often be done on the front porch. Not so with children; they were shewed off and told to go and play.

In the evening, many would return to church for a second service. Then, it was home, a light meal and time to go to bed.

Yes, something precious and vital has been lost, but how so? Well, for one thing, the old order I have described represented God's order. At the time of the French Revolution, the atheistic revolutionaries, in an attempt to eliminate the Lord's Day and its association with the resurrection, put in place a ten-day week. It did not work. After 12 years of experimentation, the old seven-day week was restored with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

We humans, it seems, were made for a sabbath, one day out of seven to recharge our spiritual batteries. A sign out front of a church read, “Seven days without God makes one weak.” A lousy pun? Perhaps. The words are nevertheless true.

Keeping the Lord’s Day special may well be an old-fashioned virtue that needs to make a comeback in our harried world. Why not look for ways to make this comeback happen in your home? Worship (even if it must be on the internet at this time) and an afternoon drive in the country might be a good place to begin.

O GOD, who makest us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of thy Son our Lord; Vouchsafe us this day such blessing through our worship of thee, that the days to come may be spent in thy service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.