

Sermon Proper 4 2018

June 3, 2018

Mark 2:23-3:6

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words, **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”**

As we hear the Gospel Lesson this morning, on the surface it sounds like we have two interesting stories for casuistry. Two case studies to examine and figure when Rabbi Yeshua Ben Yosef sees fit to bend the rules for the Sabbath. And what are those?

Well, here we see Jesus showing it's better to do good on the Sabbath and to overcome hunger than be overly strict in our observance of the Sabbath. In fact, I have heard from my brother pastors and even professors in seminary the statement that in cases of emergency there is no law. When circumstance dictate that we have to overlook one command of God for the sake of our neighbor, that is just the reality sometimes. For example, when do we ordinarily baptize? Sunday morning with the pastor, right? But in an emergency who can baptize? Any Christian. In fact, the Church Father Augustine is known for having made the example of two Christians trapped on a boat. He said that in that emergency the one could baptize the other and then the one having just been baptized could speak absolution to his baptizer.

Does this mean the pastoral office is useless? No, but what we see a lot of Christians do is take this to mean that the pastor doesn't matter, that the Church doesn't matter, that it's just me and my faith. And maybe my Bible. But this is just self-justification. Is it all wrong? No. But when we are using the exception to make the rule it certainly is. There are certainly times when we have to make these exceptions, but otherwise it's just self-justification. And you see self-justification is just what the Pharisees wanted to do. They wanted to catch Jesus in the act. In fact, there was a rabbinical rule to stone people in cases of the intentional violation of the law of the Sabbath. That's what they wanted. As my Lutheran Study Bible notes, they wanted to use this as opportunity to criticize

Jesus' followers "because they really wish to criticize the authority and status of the Lord"

But why? Because this is what we do with the law. We want to take it and have authority over it. Notice what they're asking. "Is it LAWFUL?" Is it lawful to pluck those grains? Is it lawful for you to heal? In other words, the Pharisees are saying, "I want to interpret the law. I want the law to justify my view. I want to ignore the law when it fits my life to ignore it, but I want to harp on the law when I can use it to beat down my enemies."

And this isn't just something the Pharisees in Jesus' time did, is it? It's really easy for us to do as Christians, isn't it? I used to find this when I was in evangelicalism. "We know the Gospel, now get on with the Christian Life. You don't need forgiveness you need to get up and get to it!" But it's easy for us as Lutherans too. Easy for us to justify our own sins, but then use the law to have power and authority over others. For us to justify ourselves over those doing better than us. And as I say this, Christians, non-Christians may sadly not be saved but their mercy can put us to shame sometimes. Their willingness to love those outside of their own tribe should teach us something about love. I'm not saying there isn't a place to speak the law, but we don't watch the lives of others in order that we can "accuse" them, like the Pharisees did. We don't confront sin to make ourselves better. We do it to help our neighbor. But the sinful nature likes that ability to pat ourselves on the back and justify ourselves before God and the world. It likes to stand over others as if we are the court of law. All the more when they are against us, when they appear our enemies. But Jesus? He speaks and we are silenced, just like the Pharisees. We can't ultimately stand before God justified of our actions. We aren't good enough. I'm not, you're not. None of us.

In fact look at Mark's words: "**And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.**" Our self-righteous accusation brings up Jesus' anger, his wrath—His *orge*. It angers Him. But at the same time it grieves Him. He literally is hurt with us by our hardness, the covering of our hearts by callouses, by our callousness. He's hurt because, you see, all of this justification by the law isn't the point. This casuistry isn't the point.

We're going to talk about how to be obedient to the law. **"The Sabbath was given for man, not man for the Sabbath."** We're going to talk about David? Who's greater than David? Jesus. **"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."** Yes this isn't about the Law. It's about the fact that Jesus is the Lord who heals our dried up, withered and dead hearts rather than our dried up and withered hands.

In fact, as we think about this in relation to the Law, I don't think there is another command that is a greater gift to us than the third. Why? Well to be sure all other commandments are helpful in knowing how we might not offend God and be cast away from Him. They are all the more helpful in seeing our unrighteousness, as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law, rather through the Law we become conscious of sin." We're not saved by the Law, by God's commands. Instead, those commands show us how short we've fallen and need our Savior, Jesus. But the Third Commandment tells us about what God wants for us. He wants us to hold His word sacred, gladly hearing and learning it. He wants us to be able to rest. How? From work, sure, our bodies have to have that! But in Jesus. Luther called it sanctifying. And he said in the Large Catechism, *"How does this sanctifying take place? Not when we sit behind the stove and refrain from external work, or deck ourselves with garlands and dress up in our best clothes, but, as has been said, when we occupy ourselves with God's Word and exercise ourselves in it."*

You see Christians, Jesus is our Sabbath rest. We don't know the Gospel and then get on with the Law, with the Christian Life. Jesus is the Christian's Life. The Sabbath rest of resting from your works. Does that mean you aren't called to do good works? Of course not! But, as the writer to the Hebrews says, **"there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His."** Jesus is the Sabbath rest who comes and gives you rest in His Holy promise of the forgiveness of your sins. The Sabbath rest who hanged on the cross for you, shed His blood for you, died that you would live, rose that you would rise in Him. That is your Sabbath Rest. Jesus who earned your salvation because there was no way that you could do the works necessary to earn them yourself.

Furthermore, this Jesus is the One who baptized you into that rest, into the forgiveness of your sins which He has won for you. Who speaks your sin forgiven, speaks His rest into your ears by His Word. Jesus is the One who feeds you with His own body and blood giving you nourishment in that rest. Jesus your Sabbath rest.

You see that command to remember the Sabbath isn't about me following the law so that I might dot my i's and cross my t's, it's about God giving to me. And as I say this I want you to think about this in relation to your whole understanding of worship. When I ask you what it means to come and worship at Church, what's your understanding as to why you come? Often we as people think about in terms of me giving God my thanks, of me giving God my praise. And does that happen here? Of course it does. But is that the most important thing that happens here? No. In fact I read a quote online from a book called *Fire and Staff* by a Missouri Synod Pastor named Klemet Preus that says it well. *"If the Divine Service is viewed primarily as our praising God, then you can do that just as well from home. In fact, [in looking] at the topic of vocation, you... see that we can serve God better in the world than in the church building. But if the service is understood as God giving us the forgiveness of sins, then you've got to be there. It is very possible that the low attendance at Sunday services seen in so many churches today is a reflection of how we define the service. If I am acting, then I can do it another time. If God is acting, I better be there."*

Christians, that's the joy of Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath, that's the joy of Jesus as our Sabbath rest. He comes and He gives that rest to us. God calls me to hear His word, not because He wants to brow beat me into obedience and submission under Him. No. He shows me that what it means to be the Lord of the Sabbath in other words is to give up His everything, to give up the riches of heaven in order that He can take on my sin, be crucified for it, then come to me on Sunday morning-or whatever time the Divine Service happens-and give me His mercy, His love, and His rest in my sin-broken and fallen life. Amen.