

Lord of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23-28

Sunday, June 2, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown,
Iowa

- *Introduction: pleasing God or pleasing people. Which is harder?*

The passage this morning asks the question, is it easier to please God or to please people? I suppose it depends on the person, and someone considering the holiness of God might answer that pleasing God is harder, but this passage implies that it is people that can be harder to please. It has been said of people who follow the teachings of famed theologian John Calvin are more Calvinistic than Calvin himself. Here we find that leaders of the synagogue Jesus attended were more concerned about the sanctity of the Sabbath than Jesus Himself, and this led to a conflict between Him and them, just one of many. During the conversation, Jesus made the controversial statement: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (part of Mark 2:27-28)

- *Set the stage*

I've been to the location of this synagogue.

Capernaum, the location of this story, is no longer an inhabited town, but it is an archeologist's paradise. Just across the street from Peter's home is the ruins of a 4th century AD synagogue, built on the foundation of the synagogue in which this episode took place. On the way, presumably, to the synagogue, the disciples walked through a field of grain and they begin to pluck and eat the heads of grain. Pharisees, who happened to be nearby, confronted Jesus, insisting that such activity is not lawful. Jesus would have none of it. He points out the situation in which King David, on the run from King Saul, goes to Abiathar the priest for food for him and his men. All the priest has are loaves of bread that had been in the Tabernacle, replaced every Sabbath. Such bread was to be eaten by the priests only, yet Abiathar gave the bread to David and God did not rebuke him for it (cf. 1 Samuel 21:1-6, Leviticus 24:5-9). His point was that God had more concern for human need than for detailed rules. Compounding this was the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures allowed people eating heads of grain any time, but

the Pharisees were complaining because Jesus broke a rule that was man-made, designed to guard against violating the Sabbath. (Deuteronomy 23:25) It was in this context that Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

How is the Sabbath made for Man?

I know that it is not always good to quote whole sections of a commentary in a sermon, but this paragraph from the Preacher's Homiletical Commentary says it so well: "It was set apart by Divine sanction from the beginning, not merely from the time of Moses, when God only reminded His people of that which had existed long before.

Reasons for Sabbath observance.—The following are the reasons given in the Old Testament for the observance of the Sabbath: 1. In memory of the Creation, and of God's rest from His work (Exodus 20:11). 2. To protect those whose time is at the disposal of others (Deuteronomy 5:14). 3. In memory of the deliverance of God's people (Deuteronomy 5:15). 4. As a sign between God and His people of their sanctification by Him (Ezekiel 20:12). So now the weekly Lord's Day, with its Eucharistic celebration, is the great testimony to the Church's perpetual union with her once crucified but now reigning Head."

- **Application:**

People are more legalistic than God. God is more interested in meeting human need. Note what happened next in the synagogue. Jesus ordered the man to stretch out his hand. Our hands and arms may be fine, but we have something else wrong. What does the Lord want us to offer to him so that He can heal it?

- **Conclusion**

It turns out, I believe, that people are often more legalistic than the Lord, who nonetheless is holy and just and tolerates no sin. One example is the command to maintain a Sabbath, although we do it on Sunday in honor of the resurrection of Jesus. Sabbath is not meant to be a burden, but rather a time to honor God, reorient ourselves and to get in touch with the Lord of life and health. The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.

Theme: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Object: A list of silly laws.

Scripture: Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. Mark 3:4 (NIV)

Sometimes the people who make our laws get a little carried away and pass some very silly laws. I did some research on the Internet and found some examples of some of the silliest laws I have ever heard of.

In Fairbanks, Alaska, it is illegal to serve alcohol to a moose. I wonder if it is legal to serve alcohol to a bear?

There is a city in Arizona where it is illegal to drive a car in reverse. So, how are you supposed to get out of your parking space at the mall?

There is a town in Minnesota where a woman can be arrested for impersonating Santa Claus. Hmm. . . I wonder if they can impersonate Mrs. Santa Claus?

In Oklahoma, people who make ugly faces at dogs can be arrested and put in jail or fined. I wonder if a bulldog can get thrown in the pound for making ugly faces at people?

In Nicholas County, West Virginia, a preacher is not allowed to tell jokes from the pulpit. Uh-oh, I hope they don't think this sermon is a joke!

In Morrisville, Pennsylvania, women need a permit to wear makeup. Oh my! I hope the makeup police aren't here this morning.

I think you will all agree that those are some pretty silly laws, but this is nothing new. Even back in the day when Jesus lived, they had some pretty silly laws. There was a group of religious leaders called the Pharisees who were keepers of the law of Moses and they believed that keeping the law was everything. They also believed that their own understanding and teaching about the law was the only correct teaching. Jesus was quite often opposed by the Pharisees and was accused of breaking the laws of Moses, especially the laws regarding the Sabbath. Today's lesson tells us about two times that the Pharisees accused Jesus and his followers of violating the Sabbath.

One Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples were walking through some fields of grain. His disciples were hungry and began to break off some heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees saw it and said to Jesus, "Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?"

Realizing the foolishness of the Pharisees to compare breaking off a few heads of grain to eat with harvesting the whole crop, Jesus answered them, "Haven't you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests were allowed to eat. He also shared it with his companions."

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."

Another time, Jesus went into the synagogue and noticed that there was a man who had a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched to see if he would heal the man

on the Sabbath. If so, they would accuse Jesus of working on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned toward his enemies and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil?" The Pharisees refused to answer him.

Jesus looked at them angrily and was saddened at the hardness of their hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held out his hand and Jesus healed him. Immediately left to go and meet with Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.

One of the ten commandments says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy", but can you imagine a law so silly that you could not do a good thing like healing someone because it was the Sabbath? Surely that was not what God meant.

Dear Father, help us to be faithful in following the teaching we find in your Word, but also help us to follow the example of Jesus in loving and caring for others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Note: The "silly laws" were taken from the How Stuff Works website. They were not checked for accuracy. You may wish to choose your own examples.