

*When Jesus is Lord*  
 Mark 2:23-3:6 ~ Second Sunday after Pentecost  
 Communion Meditation ~ June 3, 2018

***Introduction to the Scripture:***

Scandal. Controversy. What is Jesus up to? It's only the second chapter in Mark's Gospel, and by the end of today's text, plans to destroy him are already underway. Listen closely and you will see: he is breaking no laws. Jesus is being Lord, teaching here, "doing good" there. So what's the problem here?

***Meditation:***

- In Bluff, Utah pastors are prohibited by law from eating onions on the Sabbath between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.
- In Hickory Plains, Arkansas the law states that no female wearing a nightgown can be rescued by a fireman while church services are being held anywhere in the community.
- In Redbush, Kentucky it is illegal for anyone to be seen riding an "ugly horse" on Sunday.
- In Crawford, Nebraska, if you're a woman who is single, widowed or divorced, don't even think about parachuting on Sunday—you'll be arrested and fined.<sup>i</sup>

"Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work... Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a might handy and an outstretched arm, therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath." (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

How did we get from this holy commandment at the core of our Ten Commandments, a law designed to help us remember who and whose we are, to laws like, "No riding ugly horses on Sundays"? Somewhere along the way, we've lost the purpose and meaning for which the law was intended. If you asked a faithful Jew in Jesus' time, or if you asked a Jewish friend now, why they practice Sabbath, I'm sure they would be able to tell you. They know it is the Fourth of the Ten Commandments and was the one that has set them most clearly apart from the Egyptians since the time of Moses. Remembering the Sabbath, lay at the very heart of their identity as faithful Jews. It set them apart from people of other religions or no religion.

What helps us remember who and whose we are? Here in my first year in Wisconsin, every week I'm learning more about what helps us remember who we are here in Marshfield, WI--the center of it all. The Dairy Fest this past weekend clearly indicates it has something to do with cheese and milk and cows. My friends visiting from Ohio have been to many parades. But never to one where cheese gets

thrown at them. It's not just cheese—it's cheese and politics. Here in Wisconsin, I'm learning, we eat cheese and we vote. And some of us go to church. There were some church floats. Yes: as my staff already anticipated and feared: my ideas are already forming for our FPC float in the 2019 Dairy Fest Parade.

And what helps us remember who and whose we are at here at FPC? Here's what I learned this weekend: We are people who know how to run a rummage sale. Wow! A Navy Seal Team could not have been more precise in the rolling out of the Tarp, the display, Sale Day, the Buck a Bag morning after sale, the dispatching of unsold items to multiple worthy donation destinations, the folding up of the Tarp, known as, The Rummage Sale. OK, "Thou Shalt Have A Rummage Sale" is clearly not one of the Ten Commandments. Nor did we hold it on the Sabbath. But there is a holy connection I will attempt to make in a moment. And no, it is not, "so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Rummage sale." Although, of course, that is true, even if it's not in the Torah.

First, let's take a closer look at our scripture lesson. Clearly in this two-scene clip from the story of Jesus, where in Scene 1, Jesus pushes back against the legalism of the Pharisees who appear inexplicably in the midst of a wheat field (not typically where Pharisees hang out) and in Scene 2, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand who happens to be there in the synagogue with these same Pharisees standing by: Mark is pushing a point I hope we don't miss. It strikes at the heart of Jesus' mission while he was "making his way" with his disciples. And it strikes at the heart of Mark's Gospel. Here it is: Jesus is the One who brings us to the center of who we are, whose we are, why we are. Jesus has the power to heal and restore even the most withered of us back in sync with God Almighty. And yes, there will be pushback and misunderstanding.

It's so easy to forget. It's so easy to get sideways: Easy for all of us of any religion and of no religion. The Pharisees were *not* inherently evil people, nor were they narrow-minded legalists who took special pleasure in quibbling over details. We Christians tend to paint them with that broad and inaccurate brush stroke. In fact, they were deeply religious Jews, who passionately believed in the legal scaffolding that enabled all the people, not just the priests, to take seriously the practice of their faith: Minute by minute, day by day, week by week.

The irony here looms loud and large. Sabbath, a commandment intended to keep the faithful grounded, centered, on our dependence on God, is the very rule that's hanging them up, and keeping them from seeing how Jesus is fulfilling this Law in its deepest, most authentic sense. Much more could be said about Sabbath keeping, for us here and now--But that will be another sermon, another day. The one point I want to make today about Jesus and Sabbath keeping is this: It is a misinterpretation of Jesus' words and actions in this story to decide he is hereby superseding or invalidating the practice of Sabbath. Jesus was actually using words and laws already on the books, to help his fellow Jews to get back on track with the "why" behind the "what" regarding the Sabbath.

My 94 year-old Mom has a 97-year old friend nick-named “Posey,” who also graduated from Wellesley College. They are sister alumna who shared one year at college together in 1944-45. Now 73 years later, they live down the hall from each other in the Assisted Living at a Retirement community near Philadelphia: Husbands deceased, children and grandchildren grown-up and gone. They now share breakfast together almost daily. When I visited my mom in April, Posey called me over to ask an urgent question my last morning there. It is one we all have I believe, but one that becomes more urgent at age 97. Her question was this, “Why am I still here? What is my purpose in living at this stage? Surely it’s more than just eating and sleeping, and the routine of daily living, which becomes a bigger and bigger challenge, if we are blessed to make it into the “90’s club.” Posey, now legally blind from macular degeneration, has been a churchgoer just about her whole life. She told me (knowing I am a preacher) that she wished there were more sermons about that. Good advice, I hope I remember to heed.

Posey was asking the urgent question at the heart of this text and at the center of our Communion Table. Why are we here? As long as we are blessed to live on this earth, we are here to do God’s will. We are here to share God’s love wherever we are, however we can. A smile across the breakfast table after a long night to a friend who is feeling alone or scared: there’s your purpose in action. When Jesus is Lord, and we let Jesus set the course, there is always important work to be done. When Jesus is Lord, we can let God take our dead ends and our missteps and transform them helping us to become deeper, more grounded people. When Jesus is Lord, we can let the Prince of Peace show us to be peacemakers in our homes, communities and world. When Jesus is Lord, we can let Jesus equip us to do our part to heal this broken world.

Here’s where the Rummage Sale can help us. Really! It’s not just the wonderful community that forms and strengthens around this shared event—as great as this is. It’s not just the people from all over Marshfield who make their pilgrimage here and pick up a bargain, along with a side dish of witnessing faith and love in action—as grace-filled as that is. For me, the core of it starts with its story: the idea that the need for money to purchase Bibles for our children, ignited this small idea 13 years ago that has grown into something so much more. At this sale, we take what we no longer need, what seems like junk to us, and transform it into cash, yes--\$3,236.00 this year to further the work of the church body. It’s a death and resurrection of sorts, and a wonderful means of recycling at the same time. Right over there in our Fellowship Hall. That’s one powerful way of expressing our faith.

Today we are here in our sanctuary, getting ready to come to the Table: Jesus’ parting gift to his disciples and to us. The meal that recalls, and revives; renews and reconciles us to Jesus, to each other, to the work to which we have been called. There is always space for grace. And that is where the seeds of hope for a better way, a better world begin, slowly, quietly.

It's so easy to get out of step, to get caught up in the "what" and lose sight of the "why" – I know I do. It's so easy to drift off the path, no longer 'making our way' in step with Jesus, but running in circles and wondering why we're not moving forward. It's also tempting to run like crazy in the opposite direction, rather than face the truth that will lead to the healing that we long for.

I hear Jesus calling us to the Table where there is always space for grace. Come to the Table where all are welcome. Come to the Table where all are fed. Come to the Table where the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation can heal our withered souls and bring us back to Jesus' way of Love. Come to the Table where we taste the freedom of letting Jesus be Lord.

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- <sup>i</sup> E. Wayne McLaughlin, *The Three Pigs of Jesus: Reflections on Faith, Tolerance, and Love*, (iUniverse, Inc: Lincoln: NE, 2006), pp. 35-36.