



June 3, 2018 - What Sunday Is For Given by Rev. P. Schroeder

St. Mark 2:23-3:6, 2 Corinthians 4:5-12, Deuteronomy 5:12-15

We have some really good things to learn from these lessons: what laws are good for, who Jesus really is, and why Sunday is such a special day. Let's see what they are, and I hope you can ready yourself for an eyeopener or two.

We begin with the lesson from St. Mark, a powerful and slightly subversive story. Jesus is caught, and accused of, breaking the law, basically doing some forbidden work on the Sabbath day, and twice in this one lesson from St. Mark. The first time he was harvesting some grain so he and his friends could eat, and he pointed out how great King David had done something similar back in his day. The second time he was healing a man with a crippled hand on the Sabbath, which was a good and merciful thing to do...but not on the Sabbath. And that was the tipping point for those true believers who were looking on: they immediately conspired to do Jesus in. They probably didn't realize they would get written up for it and we would be remembering them for it on this Sabbath day some twenty centuries later. But that's one of the things the Bible is good for, helping us remember. So please, take time to read your Bible...and to remember stories like this one.

You're probably surprised to hear that Jesus was a lawbreaker, but this tells us something very important, both about Jesus and about laws. What's interesting here is what Jesus says in his defense. In the second incident he says, Are you going to fault me for doing good to a needy neighbor because it happens to be the Sabbath? Do you catch the irony of that question: Do you mean to tell me you've got a problem with me helping someone on the Sabbath day? You say you've got a rule against it? On the Sabbath day? And in the first incident he says, The Sabbath was made for us, not us for the Sabbath. What's subversive about that is Jesus is saying people are more important than laws. That is, our job is to serve people, not to serve a set of laws. That is, laws are meant to help us serve people, but when laws get in the way of our serving people, then we have to question them. That was subversive then, and it's subversive still today.

Laws are good, they serve a good purpose. They help us take care of one another, and they help us take care of ourselves. Don't kill people, don't steal from people, don't tell lies about people - that's three of the ten commandments, good laws. Don't covet or be greedy, watch your language, say your prayers - that's three more. Those are good things, we should observe them, it belongs to our humanity and our maturity to do so. They help us care for ourselves and for one another in our needs. But you know, we can club people to death with our laws. Some examples? You ran a red light to get a neighbor to the hospital? Pay your fine! You took some medicine that's not approved to ease your pain - serve your time! We can use our laws to club people. We can insist that in all cases the law simply must be served, observed. But Jesus says, No, it's *people* are to be served, not laws. People are to be served our love, our care, our help.

So (forgive the language) love trumps the law. Or as St. Paul later says, Love fulfills the law (Romans 13:10). Love is what the law is all about, but law is an imperfect expression of love. Laws cannot envision every situation, but every situation is asking for our love. So love trumps the law, love fulfills the law. The greater purpose of all laws is to teach us to love.

Well, some of our laws might bear some scrutiny in the light of this story. We might think of our immigration laws, or our criminal justice laws, or the DACA law (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) that is under a lot of scrutiny these days to the point where our last two presidents have curtailed it, though our current president curtailed it and then later changed his mind about it. There is a graphic story about a DACA woman named Corina in the April 16 issue of *Time Magazine* that has helped some people change their

minds about these so-called “dreamers,” undocumented immigrants who came here as children and have really had no other home than America. The point is we aim not just as Christians but as Americans to help people, not to hurt them. Christians treat people differently because Jesus did. Christians treat laws differently because Jesus did. We want to love people with our laws, not beat them up or punish them. The Christian idea is rehabilitation and help, not revenge and punishment. The Christian idea is inclusion, not exclusion, “how may I help you,” not “stay out of my life,” not Love some people sometimes but, as one church puts it in their welcome, Love every single person every single time. A Scotsman named Andrew Fletcher once put it another memorable way - he said, You may write the nation’s laws, if I may write her songs. But Jesus’ way of putting it lives on most memorably - he said, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

We turn more briefly now to our second lesson, from St. Paul’s Second Corinthians. It lends great support to this lesson from St. Mark. Here St. Paul describes Jesus for us. “We proclaim Jesus as Lord,” he says, not the Torah, not even the Bible. “We proclaim Jesus as Lord...and us as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Jesus served us with his life and his death and his love, and so now we set ourselves to serve one another. Paul goes on to say that what has happened in Jesus is that God has given us the light of the knowledge of his glory. That’s a rather hifalutin way of saying, God has given us in Jesus a sort of picture of himself, what God is like and what God is up to. This is why we call Jesus some of the names we do: he’s the Image of God, he’s the Word of God, he’s the Son of God. That doesn’t mean Jesus had some strange divine genes mixed in with his human genes. It means that the light and the love of God lives in his very human genes quite extraordinarily. In another place (Colossians 1:19) St. Paul says it this way: “In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” That is, God lived fully in Jesus the way God wants to live fully in you and me, too, so that when people encounter us, when we have to do with people (family, neighbors, everybody), what they see and feel and experience in us is something of the light and love of God, the smile of God, the warmth of God, the hospitality and generosity of God. Is that a high calling that you and I have in Jesus? You bet it is! And we came to church today, isn’t it true, precisely to be reminded of that!

When people encountered Jesus, he wasn’t some strange duck. He was a fully human servant of God - that’s how Jesus describes himself (John 4:34, 5:30). And it’s the same with us, clay jars, cracked pots that we are (that’s what Paul calls us). We have this same treasure that Jesus has - with absolutely extraordinary results: yes, we get afflicted...but we are not crushed by our afflictions; yes, we get perplexed...but we are not desperate; yes, we get persecuted...but we know we are not forsaken; yes, we get struck down...but we are not destroyed, we get back up again. See, the power that was available to Jesus is available to us, too. The life of Jesus can be made visible in our mortal flesh, too - so says St. Paul here. St. Paul isn’t teaching us some mystifying doctrine here and asking us to swallow it. He’s describing the power, the light, and the love of God that came into the world through Jesus and that wants to come into the world through you and me, too.

And guess what? This is what the liturgy is all about, this is what coming to church is all about: we come to church and we do the liturgy to see the glory of God, to see the beauty of God, and to grab it, to take hold of it, or better, to let it take hold of us, like an infection, like a beautiful, powerful, life-transforming infection. We come to church to get infected by/with Jesus: how’s that working out for you?!

This is what our third lesson today (the first one read earlier) is referring to. It’s from the fifth book of the Torah, the Bible, and it’s all about keeping the Sabbath Day holy. ‘Holy’ means ‘special.’ Sunday is a special day that happens once a week. I like to think of it as a reservation in time the way a beautiful park is a reservation in space. Think of Central Park in the midst of busy Manhattan or Waterfront Park down in Tampa. One way to describe Sunday’s specialness is as a day of remembrance. “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That’s why the Lord your God commands you to keep the Sabbath Day.”

So Sunday is a day to remember where we came from and why we’re here. It’s a day to stop the busyness and to look around and say, What’s it all about, Alfie? It’s a day to remember the God who brought you out. That’s one of my favorite descriptions of God. People ask, Who is God, what do you mean by God? Answer: God is the one who brings us out, out of our mother’s womb into the world, out of infancy into adolescence, out of school into a career, out of one family and maybe into another family of our own. God is the one who brought Jesus out of Mary’s womb into the world and out of Joseph’s tomb, the grave, into Easter, into Sunday (every Sunday is Easter), and out of the past into our present, our church, our home, our world. God is the one who brings us out of our fears into courage and love, out of our shyness and inhibitions into letting our light shine and our love make a difference, out of our sadness into joy, out of our disappointment into hope, etc. etc., including into delight in life even when there seems to be only a little left (as with Barbara Bush five weeks ago).

This is what Sunday is for, this is what the Sabbath is for. The Sabbath was made for us, not us for the Sabbath. We are made for love...of every single other every single time and especially of those who are hurting, maybe hurting terribly. It's crazy, it's subversive, just as Jesus our Lord is crazy and subversive. It's not a day off, it's a day on. It's a day of remembering and celebrating so that we can remember and celebrate Monday through Saturday, too, celebrate our life, our world, our families, our work, our rest, celebrate our love and our hope and our faith, celebrate the God who brings us out and the Lord who knows how and when to be subversive, for the sake of love, and urges us to give it a try, too.

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