

With the Lord, It Is Always for You

Second Sunday after Pentecost [b]

June 3, 2018

Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴ And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

In the Name of Jesus.

Jesus brings gifts.

Already in Mark's account of the Gospel—and we're only up to chapter two—Jesus has brought freedom to a man who had been bound by evil spirits; he has brought health to Peter's mother-in-law as she's bed-bound with fever; he has cleansed the skin of a man with leprosy; he has given healthy bones and strong muscles to a man who had been paralyzed; he has forgiven sins, even when the Pharisees said he was not permitted to.

Jesus has been bringing gifts. What he has not been doing is putting people under the law.

Yet, that's what is expected of him. If holy God came in the flesh to put people under the Law, to tell people how to live Christian lives, to teach Christian principles, to give methods for changing your life—if holy God came in the flesh to do that, no one would be surprised.

But God did not need to come in the flesh to put us under the Law. We were already there. We already had the Law. It's there, inscribed on the two stones of the Ten Commandments. Mary didn't need to bear a Son for us to have those tablets.

But what's in the Ten Commandments, we already had that, too. It's written in nature, in the orders of creation. And from creation, it's written on our hearts, in who we are.

Doesn't any man know it's wrong to kill his neighbor even if he's never read the Ten Commandments? Even a murderer knows that, which is why he tries to come up with a justification for it.

Doesn't everyone know deep down that it's evil to steal the crops our neighbor has worked to grow, or the car he's bought? Even the thief knows that, which is why he tries to come up with an argument of why it's acceptable for him to do it.

Doesn't everyone know that a man marries a woman and from that union there's children and family? This is all known by nature, by what's in our consciences. You can call it natural law, you can call it orders of creation, you can call it morality. The Ten Commandments just took it all and wrote it down in simple, clear form.

So we had that without God coming in the flesh. He came in the flesh not to put people under the Law, which we already had, and which was already striking us with guilt and turning us against one another as we judge each other, but he came in the flesh to bring gifts.

Yet, that's not what is expected.

The demand is for Jesus to hit sinners with the Law. So all the eyes around Jesus, the eyes of the Pharisees, the eyes of the teachers of the Law, the eyes of Caiaphas the high priest and the Sadducees, all the eyes are fixed on Jesus to find where he goes soft on the Law. Mark 2:23:

One Sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

But the Sabbath was not Law. It was gift. It was the Lord coming into the Garden of Eden and setting a particular day upon which no work would be done, but we, his creatures, would be in communion with him, hearing his words, receiving gifts from him.

When we rebelled against that, walking ourselves into sin, the Sabbath, then, was the day of promise and gift, the day he would gather all his people to the gift of sacrifice, where the priests he appointed would sacrifice the animal, would sprinkle the blood, and upon the sprinkling of that blood would look the Israelite family in the face and say, *You are clean. God is holy. He makes you holy. This blood is a gift to you to give you cleansing from your sin. You are clean. Go home in peace.*

As the Lord gave it, the Sabbath was pure gift, pure grace, a day filled with blessing and life from holy God to the people he loved.

Then how did the Sabbath get turned into a killing law? How did it become a way to count up people's sins, to audit their lives, and to tally their bankrupt balance sheet of righteousness?

We did that. Sinners did that. God gave it as pure gift; we sinners took the gift and turned it into a demand, into a word not of grace, but of expectation and accusation.

We did it in our sinful flesh. For the Law is written on our hearts, and as those natural to the Law, our first response will always be law. As long as we're in our sinful flesh, that will be the voice of our sinful flesh. Even as we ourselves are sinning against the Law, we will turn on others in accusation.

So the Pharisees see Jesus eating wrongly on the Sabbath, or healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, and their response is not, *O look, we have been blessed to see the Lord of all life give a gift of life and creation to our brother who had a damaged hand.*

And their response was not, *O give thanks to God for this gift of healing, and now let us pray that he*

give healing to many more of our neighbors who are hurting.

But their response is, *Why is he doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?*

Sinful flesh has turned the gift into law, the promise into demand, has turned grace into guilt.

So Jesus restores the gift. Mark 2:27:

And [Jesus] said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath is the Lord’s gift of rest for the weary, of forgiveness delivered to the sinner, of grace where we are expecting Law.

At the time of Moses, it was the day appointed to go to the Tabernacle and receive the gift of the sprinkled blood and to hear the priest pronounce you and your family clean before the Lord, the time for the priest to proclaim, *The Lord your God is holy, and he makes you holy.* [Leviticus 22:32]

At the time of the Pharisees, it was the day to go to the Temple (for the Temple of stone had replaced the tent of the Tabernacle) to receive the gift of the sprinkled blood and hear the Lord’s priest forgive your sins and bestow the gift, *The Lord your God is holy, and he makes you holy.*

Now, the tabernacle has served its purpose and gone its way. The stone Temple has served its purpose and is set to be torn down. They are like old wine skins which did their job, they delivered the good wine of salvation to the Israelites who lived before the cross, and having served their purpose, they are put aside.

Jesus is now the new wine skin. His body and blood is now holiness delivered to the sinner. He is rest for the weary and life for those fearing death. He is the vessel delivering the good wine of salvation. He is Lord of the Sabbath.

So now, when we want to know the gifts of the Sabbath, we don’t go looking for the tabernacle, which is

some tent lost in the hills somewhere outside Jerusalem.

And we don't go looking for the Temple, which was torn to pieces by the Romans some 2,000 years ago, never to be built again, and we don't go looking for some priest of the line of Levi, for they were dispersed into Babylon and then into other parts long ago.

And we don't go looking for a particular day on the calendar, for that day is an old wine skin; it served its purpose. But if we want to know the gift of the Sabbath, we go to him who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

And our prayer to him may be, *Lord Jesus, we were not made for the Sabbath, our righteousness is not in us keeping the regulations of the Sabbath or in any other righteousness of the Law, but rather, the Sabbath was made for us. It is your gift.*

The Sabbath is you, Lord Jesus, calling us to your Name, you gathering us into your congregation, you assembling us to the altar of your Body and Blood, where you, the Lord of the Sabbath, are holy, and are making us holy.

Lord Jesus, let us hear your words of Sabbath rest, your words of this is my Body, my Blood, it is for you, for the forgiveness of your sin.

In the Name of Jesus.