

LUKE 14:1-14

¹ One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ⁶ And they could not reply to these things. ⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. He's getting close. The teachers of the Law are watching his every move; the Pharisees examine each step he takes; they're ready to pounce on any breach of the Law.

In chapter 13 of Luke, the Pharisees had come to Jesus and told him, "*Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.*" But they didn't care about Jesus' safety. They had been looking over his shoulder for some time, ready to catch him out for not cleaning his hands according to proper procedure (Luke 11:38), ready to accuse him of blasphemy for forgiving sins (Luke 5:21), even ready to claim that he is able to cast out demons only because he, himself, is the devil's servant (Luke 11:15).

Wherever Jesus goes, whatever he does, there are the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law measuring his every move. So when they told Jesus he needed to get out of there, for Herod wanted to kill him, they were just trying to get Jesus to leave. For a Pharisee, for a teacher of the Law, there's nothing more dangerous than the forgiveness of sins. Holding onto sins, keeping people in guilt, that gives you power over them.

If you can have someone chasing the Law, you can control them. When you're demanding people run a tight ship by the Law to clean up their lives, then you have them bowing down to you. When they see Jesus going around forgiving sins, freeing-up consciences, giving comfort to those in despair, touching the unclean, then it's time to get Jesus out of the area. Luke 13:31:

Some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus], "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

So Jesus goes to eat at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. If he won't run from Herod, he won't run from the them, either. And sure enough, while at the Pharisee's house, *Behold*, says Luke, *there appeared a man with dropsy*—a painful disease of inflammation and swelling. Dropsy, the Pharisees would tell you, indicates an immoral life. You get what you deserve, that's the understanding of the Law, and if someone has dropsy, then we can know he's inflamed with sin.

Jesus doesn't know about that. God makes the sun to rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the just and the unjust—as suffering Job could tell us, *"If we receive good from the hand of God, will we not also receive evil?"* [Job 2:10] This is just our sinful world. This is what it means to live in sinful flesh. Sickness and ill-fortune is no more proof of God's displeasure with you than earthly health and riches would prove that God is pleased with you.

So Jesus has no desire to sit in judgement on the man with dropsy. But he does love the man. Looking at the man and his suffering, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"*, Jesus said to the Pharisees. [Luke 14:3]

Jesus will heal him. But is he breaking the Sabbath Law? According to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, he is. On the Sabbath, you go to the Temple, or to the synagogue if you live in the districts outside Jerusalem. But you don't do work. That's for the other six days of the week. The Sabbath is for obedience to God's commandment.

But they don't understand the Sabbath. They neither understand the Law nor keep it. For when the Lord set up the Sabbath as the day of rest, then later when he had the Temple built for all Israel to go to, and when he told the Israelites to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, the Lord was doing all this, and was speaking his commandment, to a people who were *unholy*. How can an unholy people keep anything holy? Can a man with greasy hands keep anything clean? Will a person with a contagious disease take care of children? We sinners can no more keep the Sabbath holy than a sinner can forgive his own sins.

"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?", Jesus asks the Pharisees. The Sabbath is the Lord's day of healing, of cleansing the sinner, of bringing peace to the conscience, of bestowing the gifts of God's grace on those living in fear.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. He did not make man for the Sabbath, but he made the Sabbath for man. As Jesus walked into that Pharisee's house, Sabbath rest walked into that house. For that is who Jesus is—the Sabbath rest for every sinner.

And he wants the Pharisees to know that. He wants to pull the Pharisees back from their works-righteousness, to rescue them from putting themselves and everyone else under the Law; he loves these Pharisees and he wants them to know God as the Holy One who makes the sinner holy purely as his gift, who speaks a word to justify those living in guilt, bringing mercy and grace into lives covered in shame.

So he tells the Pharisees a little parable:

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him,⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place.¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you.¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

[Luke 14:11]

In that parable, Jesus is giving the Pharisees the gift of Sabbath rest. Because, in that parable, he is showing them who he is and what he does for the sinner. The Pharisees had tried to save sinners by putting them under the Law and showing them how to clean up their lives so they could be exalted before God.

Now Jesus has shown them the one who does not exalt himself, but who comes in humility. Who, when he walks into a feast, takes the lowest seat, honoring others over himself. Who when giving a feast, invites the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, inviting all those who cannot repay, because the whole purpose of his feast is not to reap reward, but to distribute the wealth of his banquet to those who hunger.

No Pharisee comes in humility. Much better to come in the strength of the Law. No sinner fails to exalt himself, for that is precisely what we sinners do when we try to justify ourselves—we exalt ourselves before God as those who need no mercy.

But Jesus comes to all who have exalted themselves before God by trying to live by their own worthiness, to the Pharisees and also to us—he comes in humility, a suffering servant giving himself over to death on our behalf. He comes as Sabbath rest, giving us peace and rest from all guilt. He comes as the one inviting all to his feast, all those humbled by their own sin, all those crippled by guilt, made blind by the desire for retribution, he comes to heal.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? It is lawful to do no other—that's what he came to do. He gathers us to his table. But now he who was brought to the deepest humility on the cross, he is exalted by all those he gathers to his table. *My body and my blood*, he says, as he distributes the gifts of his cross. *Your sins are forgiven.*

He binds himself to us, giving his Body to ours. He binds us to one another, for as he unites us to his body in the Sacrament, so he also unites us to one another—to all those to whom he joins himself.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? That's all the Sabbath is for.

After the cross, it's no particular 24 hour period on the calendar, it is Jesus coming in his Word to give us rest from our sins. It is him in his Sacrament, making us one with him. Him in his Baptism, joining us to his death and his resurrection.

Sabbath rest is him coming to a family as they turn in for the evening, dwelling with them in his Word, hearing their evening prayer. It is him coming to a student in a dorm room, to a patient in the hospital, to police officer dealing with crimes, coming in his word to all those he loves, giving the peace and rest of the Gospel.

And in our own community over this past week, our community struck with fear in hearing the evil of an unspeakable crime, we can pray to our Lord for his Sabbath rest.

How do you bring peace and hope in the midst of such a break out of evil in the midst of our community? We can see our community struggling with it, not knowing where to turn, and we ourselves don't know what to do.

We pray to the Lord of the Sabbath for his gift of rest and peace.

We commend to his mercy all. We commend to his mercy our city and community, the police officers who must deal with the horror, the neighbors and those who grieve for the victim, those who have done evil, the victim herself, and ourselves and our families—we commend all to our Lord for his mercy.

We commend all to our Lord for his mercy, knowing that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who forgives sins and cleanses the sinner, the one who gives peace that world cannot give—we commend to his care all, praying to him that his word may go forth and many may hear his word, and receive his gift of repentance and faith, rejoicing in his Sabbath rest and salvation.

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