

Jesu juva

“Jesus: Lord of the Sabbath”

The Second Sunday after Pentecost--B, 6.3.18 ☩

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 59th & Broadway, Sac'to, CA

Mark 2:23-3:6 2:23 One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said 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 and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26 He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” 27 Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” 4 Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was 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 conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (NRSV)

Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. [Rm. 1:7]

A pastor told a story of a Sunday school student who was asked about her favorite time of the church year.

“I like Christmas,” Sarah said. “We’re happy celebrating the birth of Jesus’, and we get presents.”

“What about Easter?” the teacher asked.

“That’s pretty good too,” Sarah said. “We get chocolate candy and new clothes, and the weather usually gets better.”

“What about the rest of the year— the time after Easter and Pentecost?”

“Well,” said Sarah, “We get off from school in the summer, but otherwise nothing much good happens then.”

We have now moved into that time after Pentecost—what we call “ordinary time”—and I must say that lots of “good” goes on all through the church year.

Take the question our Lord Jesus asked in that synagogue today, e.g., “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?”

Then he waited. - - - - - Let’s focus today on just two words in that question: “lawful” and “sabbath.”

So, Part 1, “Living Lawful”

Point 1, “Living Lawful” Means: Follow the Law, Right?

But where does “Law” come from?

A few years ago Ruth & I had to visit our attorney’s office for an estate matter, and there, in the meeting room, was a wall full of law books—all our US laws. But where did the US & California get them? Right here—from this Bible!

We can trace them all the way back to the first and second books of the Bible, where in the first book - - - Genesis, God gave Adam and Eve one command— one law—**16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”** (Gen. 2)

Well, we know how good **that** all worked out.

Then in the second book of the Bible, the book of - - - Exodus, as the children of

Israel came out of Egypt and camped at Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. (Btw, ten commandments, **not** the ten suggestions.) From those ten laws, down through history, the world got its law books. Actually, St. Paul teaches us that the law of right and wrong is written in the heart of every single person born on the face of the earth—read Rom., ch. one. And I learned that from this Catechism in Confirmation Class about 76 or 77 years ago. *[Show 35 cent Catechism]* I brought several Catechisms today. *[Show four more Catechisms]* I hope each of you knows where your catechism is—it should be right next to your reading Bible and your hymnal!

Now, Jesus followed the law, didn't he? He knew how Exodus read concerning the Sabbath, and we heard the same law in our Deuteronomy reading today: **8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work....** (Ex. 20)

But Jesus **healed** a man—right there in the synagogue/church—on the Sabbath Day! He asked the question, **“Is it lawful? to do good or to do harm?”**

What was going on there? Jesus wasn't living the law, was he—or was he?

But “Lawful Living” means **we** should follow the law, right? Point 1.

Point 2, Jesus Knew The Letter of the Law Kills.

Our Lord was here on earth to bring in the new testament.

The old testament levitical laws had become so harshly defined that the heart of the law was lost—look how hard-hearted the Pharisees were—our text reads: **2 They watched him to see whether he would cure [the man with the withered hand] on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.**

Did you notice, when he asked “Is it lawful?” and he waited? **5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart....**

Anger and grief in the heart of Jesus!

Their **hearts** were withered—in fact, following the letter of the law **kills us**.

And our hearts can wither also if we are what one theologian called “law & order” Christians.

Living life—**motivated** by the law—is not Christian.

We could become as un-loving and un-caring as those Pharisees and have our Lord's anger turned **our** way.

Having our Lord's anger turned against us could lead to eternal forsakenness.

Rather, listen—of Jesus it is written that he is the **end** of the law (Rm. 10:4)—in the sense that he **fulfilled** the demands of the law on our behalf.

Therefore, standing as he was at the turning point of all history, Jesus the Christ saved humankind—you and me—from the withering and killing spirit of Law, to be free to worship God and to serve our fellow humans.

To sum up part 1, **“Living Lawful” Means: Follow the Law. However, The Letter of the Law Kills—do we think we can survive the accusations of God's law by just trying to keep it and be good?**

Part 2, Living SHABAT.

First, SHABAT is the Hebrew verb that is the root of “sabbath.”

It means, in my old Hebrew dictionary, “To rest, To keep as a day of rest.”

Our Gospel story today began with the Pharisees on the Sabbath complaining to Jesus about his disciples when they plucked and ate grain on the Day of Rest. Why? wasn't it OK to eat on the Day of Rest? Oh, yes. But **not OK** was the act of harvesting a head of grain and threshing it out in one's hand—that's **work!** No wonder Jesus reminded them of how David's men ate the 'Bread of the Presence' that was laid out fresh every day in the Tabernacle—Abiathar the priest gave permission to break the law.

And then our Lord made this remarkable claim: **"The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."** Which is why we are free to worship on Sunday, not Saturday. Imagine, the long awaited Messiah, the "Son of Man", was ushering in the new testament where the old Sabbath law can be broken so that true 'rest' is won. Meaning that Jesus broke the Law for us - - but by that same Law He was broken.

When the Law was turned on Jesus he was broken by it upon the cross. The Pharisees won—Jesus died—do you remember what commandment they said he broke?

The very first—"You shall have no other gods."—they accused him of **blasphemy** because he claimed to be God in human form—they did not believe him. Jesus, who is Lord of the Law, was broken upon that very same law by the religious leaders in Israel, who were able to have Pilate crucify him. He paid the price so that we might have eternal Sabbath rest, and as we worship here today, we who trust in him now have the promise of Sabbath rest forever. Let's keep hold of that promise so that we may enter our final sabbath rest.

Next Point, We Now look at Living Lawful as Living the Sabbath.

We see God's Law not as, "We **got** to ...", but as "Now we **get** to" Life is law-**free**, but not law-**less**—this Augsburg Fortress Catechism can help us. In the Introduction the story is told, when Martin Luther was near the end of his life and gone from home, his wife was worried about his poor health. He wrote his wife to calm her worries and said, "You, dear Katie, read my sermons... and the Small Catechism, about which you once said: 'Everything in this book has been said about me.'" (*Introduction and translation Timothy J. Wengert, p.7*)

Katie Luther's words are strong: the Catechism gives us support and comfort in our needs—now we **get** to see the Commandments, e.g., in a new way.

Take the Third Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day, and keep it holy." What does this mean? "Answer: We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God's Word or preaching, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it." Under our constitution we **get** to worship freely—let's not lose it.

Last Point, In a country where more and more of our young people are being taught to need a 'safe space' there's a story of a little boy who went over to visit his neighbor, an old man whose wife had just died. When he came home his mother asked him what he said to the neighbor. "Nothing," he said. "I just sat on his lap and helped him cry."

We may not be able to heal a withered hand, but we may now get to heal a broken heart as people who are living in SHABAT—the REST our Savior offers us by his cross and resurrection. Amen.