

June 3, 2018  
Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Mark 2:23-28 (3:1-6)

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Mark 2:23–3:6 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” <sup>25</sup> 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: <sup>26</sup> 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?” <sup>27</sup> And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

<sup>1</sup> Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Most of us are familiar with “fake news”. The whole concept started about two years ago. Instead of calling it yellow journalism or just outright lies, political parties and newsrooms were accused of applying their own spin to news stories, changing them from news to opinions and half truths...well, to lies. It all started in an attempt to destroy the reputations and credibility of individuals running for or holding public office.

In today’s Gospel, the Pharisees, a powerful and influential political party in Jesus’ day, were endeavoring to do much the same thing, spinning activity that was taking place to suit their ongoing efforts to destroy Jesus’ reputation and credibility. The issue was the Sabbath, and while abuses of the Sabbath are common, Jesus sets the record straight, directing our attention to the Gospel.

On this particular Sabbath Day, an opportunity for such “news” was happening right before their eyes, and the Pharisees sought to use and spin it to discredit Jesus (vv 23–24) and, if possible, even punish Him.

I’m sure they were on the lookout because Jesus was not meeting their expectations and was threatening their established way of worship, even if it was wrong.

So, here is the “scandalous” scene. We read in our text that Jesus and His disciples “made their way” through a grainfield (v 23). The disciples were hungry and plucked heads of grain to eat, in itself permissible.

That wasn't the problem; you were allowed to do so according to Deuteronomy 23:25. You couldn't use a sickle like you are harvesting but you could pluck a few heads of grain.

In addition to the requirements of the Law of Moses (Ex 20:10), other rules had been created by men over the years for the Sabbath, including a rule specifically against reaping. Under the rule against reaping on the Sabbath, plucking ears (the act of breaking off anything from its stalk and rubbing it between one's hands to separate the grain) was a kind of reaping.

The punishment for reaping on the Sabbath was offering a sacrifice if the reaping was done in ignorance or being stoned to death if it was done purposefully.

The Pharisees saw this as an opportunity to find serious fault with Jesus. Here was a perfect opportunity to catch this supposed Messiah in the breaking of a law. From there this news could be spun into the worst possible light for Jesus.

By applying their strict interpretation of their rules to the disciples' activity, the Pharisees thought they could find fault with Jesus for allowing His followers to disregard and break the rules: "*Look! Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?*" (v 24).

As often happens with "fake news," this effort by the Pharisees provided opportunity for a response from Jesus, who moved the conversation from their fake news to His Good News.

Jesus and His disciples were "*making their way*" through more than a grain field. They were making their way into an opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Mark's inclusion of this story in the Gospel and his particular choice of the words "*made their way*" to describe what Jesus and His disciples were doing called attention to Christ's overall purpose during His time on earth, on this day and every day of His life, making His way to His sacrificial death on the cross.

In particular, the disciples' making a way for Jesus through the wheat field foreshadowed their doing the same for His final entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Mk 11:9–10).

Jesus used this as an opportunity to overwhelm the Pharisees' "fake news" with the truth.

First there was the truth about the Sabbath. It existed for man, not man for the Sabbath. It was a day to be set aside each week for physical rest and spiritual care. A gift of rest to mankind, not another set of rules to make his life harder.

And then there was the truth associated with David, that even as he assumed authority over the Law to feed his soldiers, now the greater David, the Son of Man, had arrived not only to assume authority over the Law but also to atone for its consequences for humankind.

These Gospel truths trumped any legal charges the Pharisees might have attempted to bring forward to destroy Jesus' reputation and credibility.

As we consider this text today, it is important to recognize that "fake news" about the Sabbath didn't end when Jesus set the Pharisees straight.

There still are some accusers similar to the Pharisees who, proud for having not missed a Sunday's worship for umpteen years, as they regard observing the Sabbath as a litmus test to judge the faith and life of other Christians.

They may even be heard to say such things. Hardly any of us are innocent of our pride, how good we are for what we do instead of thanking God for any of the gifts that He manifests in us.

Even more common though, are those who spin the Sabbath to suit themselves: "I don't really need to go to church to hear the same thing over and over again" or "I can find physical relaxation and worship God on the golf course, at a soccer field, or in the great outdoors just as well as the pew-sitter in a church building, and probably even better!"

Such attitudes toward God's Third Commandment, "*Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy,*" can easily end up in carelessly regarding all of God's commandments to put Him first. If we write or spin one off to suit ourselves, which one will be the next that is written or spun off into our own liking rather than what God really said? As we spin away from remembering the Sabbath day, this can cost us the opportunity to receive the encouragement of fellow Christians and the power of God's Gospel to strengthen their faith and life.

For this reason and prompted by our text this morning, it is important to review once more what the Old Testament Sabbath still means for us in our day.

First, the truth is that the Sabbath was created for man, provided by God to satisfy important needs for all of us, a day for physical rest and spiritual restoration.

Second, the truth is that when we do keep the Sabbath by assembling ourselves together for mutual encouragement, we have opportunity to hear no less than God's Spirit-laden Word and its reminder of the work of Jesus as he made His way to the cross, all the more important as we "*see the Day drawing near*" (Heb 10:25). Does that mean that we can do no work on Sundays? Not at all.

Sometimes we have to work, however, when we put other things, work or fun, ahead of gathering together in God's name, then we are as guilty of spinning fake news just like the Pharisees.

There are no more important words for us than "your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake; go in peace." That can be found no other place than those that are gathering in God's name hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

How sad, not to mention serious, it is when we fail to make use of opportunities to come together to celebrate together what God has done for us and to receive assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. A wealthy churchman was once approached by a church college fund-raiser to ask for a sizeable contribution for the school's endowment fund. The churchman responded: "No thanks. I don't like strawberries." Surprised by the response, the fund-raiser asked what strawberries had to do with his request for a contribution. The churchman explained: "When you don't want to do something, any excuse will do."

This tends to be the nature of all excuses not to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

Thank God for the Son of Man, who on the day in our Text made His way through the wheat field on His way to saving us from false pride or lame excuses regarding the Sabbath, along with all of our other sins. Whether is by ignoring the Sabbath, or any other command of God. Jesus died for your sins, all of your sins.

As we repent, as we call upon the name of Christ, indeed, your sins are forgiven. You may go in peace.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

### **Sermon Outline**

#### **Fake News & Good News**

*Mark 2:23-28 (3:1-6)*

- I. On this Sabbath Day, the Pharisees sought to discredit Jesus with fake news.
- II. Jesus moved the conversation from fake news to the Good News.
- III. Fake news about the Sabbath didn't end when Jesus set the Pharisees straight.