

Breaking the law: Jesus style

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Luke 6:6-11

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As part of the message this morning, I have asked Don Miller and Rebecca Ramer to each share a story of a particular experience where they felt the presence of God in a special way.

Don

Rebecca

Recently I saw a cartoon of some religious leaders talking with Jesus. Jesus said to them, “the difference between you and me is that you use scripture to determine what love is; and I use love to determine what scripture means.”

This morning our scripture tells the story of Jesus going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus was the speaker for the morning. As Jesus got up to speak, he saw a man in the congregation with a withered hand. Jesus invited this man with a withered hand to come up beside him.

I believe Jesus at that moment felt a special connection with the Spirit of God as he recognized the man with the withered hand. Jesus knew what was at stake on that day in the synagogue. He knew who was there.

Now as the scripture says, the elders and leaders of the synagogue were watching to see what Jesus would do. Jesus knew that... and he also knew what they were thinking. Was

Jesus going to heal this man on the Sabbath? Was Jesus going to break the law?

So why were they so curious about whether Jesus would break the law?

Let's look at Deuteronomy 5:12-15. (read).

The law for keeping the Sabbath holy was passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. So the leaders had a good reason to question what Jesus was going to do at this moment.

And sure enough, Jesus broke the Sabbath law. He did that intentionally after he asked those leaders a pointed question: Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath; to save life or to destroy it?

Then Jesus simply asked the man to stretch out his hand. Jesus didn't touch him, didn't pray for God to heal him...just asked him to stretch out his hand.....and it was healed!!

Our scripture says that the leaders were FILLED WITH FURY! Their judgement was that Jesus had indeed broken the Sabbath law which had been followed for generations by faithful followers of the law.

I can only imagine how angry these leaders were. Even though technically, Jesus could have argued that he hadn't done anything obvious except invite the man to stretch out his hand. But the leaders knew it was the power of Jesus that healed him.

Why would Jesus do this? Why would Jesus intentionally break the religious law of his day? Why would Jesus do something counter to the scriptures as we read from Deuteronomy 5? Why would he do something that angered the authorities of his day?

Jesus was demonstrating to all who were present that day that God's love is greater than anything else in the world. God's desire for all of us to know the extent of God's love was more important than the rules at that moment.

Yes, we know that rules are given for our common good. The sabbath rest given in the Mosaic law was meant to help people be intentional about taking time to rest, to focus on the God who loves us, to give our bodies time to recover from the demands of life. There was a reason for Sabbath.

Many books have been written about the importance of meditation and the need to intentionally focus on our body rhythms as a way of destressing, of lowering anxiety. As a way of getting to know ourselves and God our creator. Sabbath has a God-given basis for practice.

So healing the man with the withered hand was Jesus way of saying that healing was at this moment more important for the common good of the community than following the rules which had been practiced for hundreds of years.

We don't know why this was more important, but we can imagine many reasons. 1. Maybe this man's handicap was creating problems for his family. 2. Maybe the withered hand invited taunts and bullying. 3. Maybe this man felt less than a whole person because of his withered hand.

Two weeks ago, Felix Perez Diener, in his message talked about our feeling uncomfortable when we experience situations that demonstrate intimidation, injustice, and exploitation as he did with the children who lived on the landfill in Guatemala.

Besides healing the man's hand, Jesus wanted the people in that synagogue to feel uncomfortable with the oppressive rules they were expected to follow. The one way to make all the people uncomfortable and make the leaders angry was to heal this man's hand in church on a Sunday morning/ in the synagogue on the Sabbath!

So what can we learn from this today? We are in a time when the world, the country, the community around us is changing, changing at a fast pace.

As a community of faith, we need to be in particular connection/ communication with the Spirit of God to help us listen to what God wants to change in our hearts and lives. We need to listen to God's Spirit within us to hear what other "laws" God wants to break in the interest of the Kingdom of God, in the interest of the peace of God which passes all understanding.

So this morning, I invite you to listen carefully for the Spirit of God speaking in our time, in our culture, in our community of faith, in our hearts. I challenge you to be aware of how God wants us to break the rules, the cultural practices of our day for the sake of the common good; for the sake of demonstrating the incredible love of God. May God give each of you wisdom to that end.
Amen!