

Barre Congregational Church

June 2, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Second Sunday after Pentecost**~

“The Son of God is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: Mark 2 v 23 – 3 v 6

I. Introduction:

We are all trying our best to live a good life, to follow laws and regulations and all the things that are expected from us to do. None of us are perfect, right? We sometimes fail to do what is right, and then we know there are consequences for our actions. But there are also moments when we understand that mistakes happen, and that it is important to help someone through the mistake, to forgive and to let go. It is, however, not that easy for many of us to do so. It is not easy to forgive, to let go of past hurts, or live a life that is less rigid. To make a mistake can become an unforgiveable sin. What does Jesus teach us about all this this morning?

II. Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath:

Last week we encountered Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and religious leader during the time of Jesus’ ministry. He was a staunch follower of the law, and so were those in the Pharisaic tradition. Here in Mark, but particularly in Matthew Chapter 23, we see how the authority of the Pharisees in relation to Jewish law, came into contrast with the way of Jesus Christ. The way of those who followed the law to the letter was to impress on its followers to be obedient without fault, and to keep to all the rituals expected of them. So, when the leadership encountered Jesus and saw and heard the way He spoke to His followers, with empathy and in a less legalistic way, it concerned them, because He went against the core of their teachings. They did not understand Him. He was a mystery to them, especially, because He, Jesus Himself was very well educated in the Old Testament laws, so it was not a matter of Him not knowing what to do or not to do. They knew that He understood where they were coming from. Their problem was that He just did not agree with their approach to the law.

When Jesus' disciples picked some of the grain in the fields on the Sabbath, the holy day for the Jews, a day they should not be working, the Pharisees were quick to criticize them, and challenged Jesus for the sinful deeds of His disciples. One can understand that they would be upset with what they saw happening. Jesus instead reminded them of David and his companions who came to the tabernacle in Nod, hungry, and the priest gave them the consecrated bread to eat, bread that was meant for the priests only. Jesus includes in His reminder to them that these men were hungry, and they needed something to eat. For Jesus it was more important to meet the needs of those who were hungry, than to uphold ritualistic observances. Similarly, He intentionally asked the man with the deformed hand to stand up in front of all of them so that He could heal him. Again, the law prohibited any form of medical intervention, unless the person's life was in danger. He came to it from a place of deep concern for the needs of those around Him and put the concept of need above the strict observance of the law. The true spirit of the law was about justice, yes, but also of mercy and faith, and the meeting of the needs of humanity. He then went on to explain His position on the Sabbath, that it was created for the benefit of humanity, not for humanity to become slaves of the Sabbath. Mark then describes the Son of Man as Lord even of the Sabbath. Jesus' authority over the Sabbath, the Holy Day for the Jews, of which He Himself was part of, is now being made known. He is the Son of God, who created the Sabbath for the purpose of rest and worship, but in His authority, He offers another way to look at this Day, a day where one could choose to let someone suffer from hunger, because the Day is too holy to go outside of the norms prescribed to the population, or one could simply go out into the fields and pick grain so that those who were hungry could eat.

Jesus is teaching us the ethics of the law, compassion and human needs. To say it another way, love your neighbor as yourself. Mark L. Strauss in his commentary on Mark interprets Jesus' statement in Chapter 3 v 3-4 as follows, "If it is right to do good and wrong to do evil on the Sabbath, then it is even more right to save a life and more wrong to kill". The man with the deformed hand was not going to die, if Jesus did not heal Him, but Jesus wanted to make a point that one can follow the law to the extreme and have consequences on those who disobeyed the laws regarding work on the Sabbath. He came to preach another way, of forgiveness and healing and restoration of humanity.

III. Conclusion:

It is good to have a day where we worship God, and where we can be at peace and rest, focusing on one's spiritual lives and being together as a faith community and family. It is good to have a day where one can be restored, renewed for the week ahead. Similarly, in life it is good to have policies and laws in place to regulate life. What Jesus is teaching us, is that we are all fallible, with needs, and that the covenant of loving God and each other go so much further in the building of good relationships and peace in this world, than trying to follow religious observances so strictly and punitively. We also make mistakes in life, and it is important to understand that, and be able to forgive and let go of past hurts. The values of compassion and mercy and humility and kindness are the things that make for a good life with God and one another. This is what He wanted to convey then and today. It is about coming together in humble service and hearts filled with peace and joy. May God bless us all as we observe our own Day of worship and may we all remember that it is first and foremost a day of rest and worship, but that there are times one must work and heal and meet the needs of each other. May God help us to show love and mutual understanding around issues we disagree on so deeply, and help us to forgive one another forgiveness on this day and every other day to fulfill the purpose of our lives on earth. Amen