

Sunday, October 1, 2017

St. Giles' Presbyterian Church

Mark 3: 1-19; Genesis 2:1-2

Rules, Regulations, Rest

Good morning St. Giles'! It's so good to be with all of you again! This morning, we'll be taking a look at the book of Mark, chapter 3 that was read to us this morning. The chapter begins with Jesus healing a man with a shrivelled hand. And by all accounts, this is a good thing. The question then becomes, why were the Pharisees so angry with Jesus? The answer to that question is because Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. But the Pharisees' anger goes much deeper than that. And this morning as we unpack this,

(1) we'll see WHY the Pharisees were so angry was,

(2) HOW the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees relates to us

(3) AND we'll get a clearer picture of WHY the presence of Jesus and his ministry was so dangerous to the established religious order.

But before we begin, let's open up with a word of prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning wanting to know more about you. Be with us Lord, as we open up these scriptures. Holy Spirit, open our eyes,

that we might see who you truly are. Change our hearts and transform who we are so that we will become the people that you are calling us to be. This we pray in your name. Amen.

Story of the Domino's guy

It feels like it's been a long time since my family and I have been at St. Giles'. In actual fact, we've probably been away for about three weeks in September. The reason for this is because in the month of September, my family and I were in Toronto and then in Tofino.

And the reason for this is because we were away for work. My wife Alli, was in Toronto because she was attending CARO, which stands for the Canadian Association for Radiation Oncology. CARO is their annual, national meeting that is held once a year, and is held in different cities all around Canada. After we left Toronto, we went to Tofino, where we attended our friends' Brad and Emily's wedding.

Last summer, we were in Vancouver and we were asked to dinner by Brad and Emily. At that dinner, they asked if I would officiate their wedding. And of course, without hesitation, I said yes. Of course, when I agreed to officiate their wedding, I didn't realize that we would be coming from half way across the country to attend.

But it didn't matter. We had agreed to be at both events, and so for us, September has been very, very busy.

When we got back a week ago, late Sunday evening, needless to say, the whole family, including Alyx, we were exhausted. We've been trying to get back to the rhythms of life, and this week has all about trying to recuperate. One day, in the middle of the week, I decided to order in some pizza. When the Domino's guy arrived at my doorstep with lunch, we had that quick conversation that we all have when we're making small talk.

The Domino's guy says this to me – ***“Oh, looks like you have the day off.”***

And I said – ***Yeah, got a few things to take care of around the house.”***

And he says, - ***“That's who it usually goes. A day off, really isn't a day off. You've got chores around the house. Maybe do some vacuuming, clean the floors.”***

As he left and I closed the door, this quick exchange of conversation stuck with me. THIS is how we as North Americans view life, isn't it? We are constantly busy. We are constantly doing something. We are constantly on the move.

Mark 3

Mark chapter 3, touches on this subject. And in Mark chapter 3, we find Jesus and entering the synagogue on the Sabbath. We're told that as he entered the synagogue, he sees a man that is there with a shrivelled hand. And in that moment, Jesus asks the man to stand.

Now, if I were that man, how would I feel? Would I feel self conscious, because obviously I have a handicap? Or, would I feel a sense of anticipation? This teacher that everyone is talking about, Jesus – he's going to do something great! Maybe he'll heal me. Maybe I'll be able to have the use of my hand again.

Yet, after Jesus asks the man to stand up, Jesus asks a very strange and seemingly unrelated question. Jesus says this:

“Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

Mark 3:4

What a very strange thing to ask. What does the man's shrivelled hand have to do with the Sabbath? And more to the point, what does the man's shrivelled hand have to do with good or evil?

What is Jesus asking here?

The question of which is lawful on the Sabbath? To do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill? Is a question really, Mark is trying to draw the reader's attention to. If we look back to Mark chapter 2, we'll see that this is not the first time Mark brings up the issue of the Sabbath. In fact, in Mark 2, this is what he writes:

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Mark 2: 23 – 28

In order to understand what is going here, we have to understand two sides of the interpretation of the Sabbath.

On the one hand, the Pharisees are concerned about the LAW of the Sabbath. And the LAW of the Sabbath states that there is no work to be done on the Sabbath. And where did the teachers of the law derive this interpretation. They came up with this interpretation from Genesis chapter 2, where we read this morning that

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Genesis 2: 1-3

In this reading of the scriptures, the Pharisees point that IF God rested on the seventh day, then all of humankind should rest as well. PERIOD. THAT'S IT. No questions asked.

And so the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to build a fence around these kinds of laws. So, for example, if NO WORK is to be done on the Sabbath, then what does that include?

It means that, no farming can be done on that day.

It means that NO household cleaning can be done that day.

It means that NO WORK can be done that day.

And so if the disciples were walking in the grain field, on the Sabbath, and they were hungry, for them to take some of the grain and rub it between their hands, then that was considered work.

But what Jesus is saying is that, the interpretation of the Sabbath was incorrect. The Sabbath, is not about these rules and regulations, the Sabbath is not about NOT WORKING, although NOT WORKING is part of the interpretation of the scriptures

Instead, the Sabbath is all about rest.

Rest

And what is REST?

Rest is all about taking a break from your daily work.

Rest is about drinking deeply and being refreshed because the other six days, human beings have been working and toiling.

Rest is all about being reenergized.

That is rest.

Doesn't that sound amazing?

To stop and to rest.

To stop and be refreshed.

But rest even goes much deeper than that. When we take a look at Genesis chapter 2, we have to ask ourselves, WHY did God rest? Did God NEED rest? Of course not! He's God! He's all powerful. He's all mighty. Why did God rest? He rested because he was SATISFIED with his work. His work was COMPLETE. He had created the heavens and the earth. He had created day and night. He had created the animals and humans beings. And after all that work, he stopped. He rested. He looked back on his creation and was SATISFIED.

And if this is what GOD has done, even in the beginning, then this is the kind of God that I want to follow! God understands our rhythms. God understand how we are made. God understands that if he doesn't build into the rhythm of life a time of rest, WE as humans, probably would NEVER take a break and keep working.

And if we keep working without rest, what does that mean? To me, that sounds like a lot like slavery.

In the Sabbath, God has built in a reminder that WE are NOT slaves. We are not created to tirelessly work and satisfy HIS needs or anyone else's. In rest, we are reminded that we are human beings. That we too get tired and that we too need to stop and breathe, and be refreshed.

The Pharisees

And that's why the Pharisees are so angry with Jesus. The Pharisees are angry with Jesus because HE is messing with THEIR belief system.

Their belief system says that IF WE follow the rules and regulations that have been set out for us, if we tick all the boxes, if we dot our "I's" and cross our "T's", then God will be satisfied with US and WE will be blessed because of this.

And what Jesus is saying, is no. God the Father who has created us, he understands our human nature. He models for us how we ought to LIVE, so that we can BE the people that he has created us to be. Our Father in heaven knows us. And he wants the best for us. And in the case of the Sabbath, it's not about following a bunch of rules so that we won't rest. But instead, the Sabbath was created to benefit us with rest.

And that's why in Mark chapter 2, it ends with these words.

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

– ***Mark 2: 27***

Let's let that sink in for a moment.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a GIFT from God.

It's made for us, to be refreshed and rejuvenated, SO THAT we can continue to work!
Because work is good.

Refreshed and Rejuvenated

The idea of REST being about being refreshed and rejuvenated is reinforced with our passage this morning of Mark chapter 3. In the passage then, we go back and we see that the man with the shrivelled hand is standing in front of everyone. He's standing there and Jesus asks that question,

"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"

Mark 3:4

And the answer that Jesus got from the Pharisees was sheer and total silence. You'd figure that the teachers of the law would have SOMETHING to say. But I think the reason why they remained silent was because the answer was obvious. If we are to choose between good or evil, of course they are going to choose good. If they are going to choose between saving a life or to kill a life, of course they would choose to save a life.

The answer was obvious.

But to remain silent didn't mean they COULDN'T give an answer. Instead, to remain silent mean that they WOULDN'T give an answer. And so they stood there. **In SILENCE.**

And Jesus, looks at them, and is totally frustrated and totally saddened, because they wouldn't give up their position that in order to keep the Sabbath, they had to stick to a set of RULES. They couldn't, for one moment, put those rules down and embrace what Jesus was asking them to do. Which was to do good, even IF it meant that they were breaking their own rules.

And so Jesus shows it to them. He says to the man with the shrivelled hand – stretch out your hand! Be healed!

And we're told that the man's hand was TOTALLY restored.

Now I love this passage because if we're talking about the Sabbath and we're talking about Sabbath as being refreshed and rejuvenated, how much MORE evidence do we NEED that the Sabbath is about all of these things when we see that the man's hand is completely and TOTALLY restored.

This man's hand was HEALED, which meant that he was REJUVENATED. And if you were a man who's hand was restored and you can use it again, it meant that you could go the next day, AFTER the Sabbath was finished and then you could go and WORK. In restoring the man's hand, Jesus was giving the man a second lease on life. He was now able to provide once again for himself and for his family. In this passage we see the true power of the Sabbath. And that is the point that Jesus is trying to get across.

The End of Religion

This whole exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees in both Mark chapter 2 and Mark chapter 3 has a deeper implication to the message that Jesus was bringing. On the surface, it would seem that Jesus and the Pharisees are arguing about the issue of the Sabbath and of rules and regulations and of rest. But ultimately though, the

underlying reason that the Pharisees are angry with Jesus is because Jesus ultimate claim, THAT is that HE is the Son of Man.

Jesus says this to the Pharisees:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” – Mark 2: 27-28

When Jesus says this, the Pharisees are indignant with him. How can Jesus make this claim? Jesus was essentially saying that THEIR rules DON'T apply to him. This would have turned their world upside down. And that deeper implication that Jesus is pointing to is that their religion, their rules, their regulations, all of that had now ended. In this one statement, Jesus was saying that no longer do you have check boxes you needed to mark off. No longer did you have to dot your “I’s” and cross your “T’s” in order to satisfy God. You will find your refreshment, you rejuvenation in me!

And so when we go to chapter 3 and we see that Jesus is saying the same thing to the Pharisees in that you ARE to do good even on the Sabbath, how did the Pharisees react?

⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. – Mark 3: 6

We're told that the Pharisees were so angry with Jesus that they went out to plan on HOW they were going to kill Jesus.

Now there's a bit of irony here. The Pharisees just finished an exchange with Jesus. Jesus asks them, "*Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?*" – Mark 3:4. And we have already established that of course the answer to this question is that it is lawful to save a life on the Sabbath. Yet, the irony here is that the Pharisees were so blinded by their hatred for Jesus, that they actually went out and did the UNLAWFUL thing, which was to go out and plot on how they would bring about the DEATH of Jesus.

Yet, there's one more thing that we can point out here. In Mark 3: 6, we're told that the Pharisees went out and enlisted the help of the Herodians in this great scheme.

And the question you might ask yourself is this. Who are the Herodians? Timothy Keller writes this:

"The Herodians were the supporters of Herod, the nastiest of the corrupt kings who ruled Israel, representing the Roman occupying power and its political system. In any country that the Romans conquered, they set up rulers. And wherever the Romans went, they brought along the culture of Greece – Greek philosophy, the Greek approach to sex and the body, the Greek approach to

truth. Conquered societies like Israel felt assaulted by these immoral, cosmopolitan pagan values.” – Timothy Keller, The King’s Cross. Kindle location 722 + 733

And so the Pharisees go and enlist the help of the Herodians, what they were actually doing was enlisting the help of a group of people who were diametrically opposed to their own belief system. The Pharisees, the teachers of the law, hated Jesus so much, that they were willing to join forces with people who believed the exact opposite of what they were teaching.

And I love how Timothy Keller sums this all up. He writes,

“The gospel of Jesus Christ is an offense to both religion and irreligion. It can’t be co-opted by either moralism or relativism.” Timothy Keller, The King’s Cross. Kindle Location 732

In this passage then, we see the point that Mark is trying to make. Jesus, in his standing up to the Pharisees is saying that the good news that I’m bringing is one that cannot be manipulated by human understanding. Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father, except through Him.

Conclusion:

When we take a look at this passage of Mark chapter 3, we can take away a few things.

(1)

First of all we can see the importance of the Sabbath as it applies to us! We too need to stop and rest and be rejuvenated. In whatever you do, if it be work or school, you have to remember to stop and to rest. And like God, who rested and was satisfied with his work, we too must also try and practice the same thing.

Where is your satisfaction in your work or in your school? Are you satisfied with what you've done this past week or are you right here, right now, thinking about your action list and what you need to do? Take that time to rest and be refreshed. Put those things down, even for today. So that when Monday morning comes around, you can pick it up again, knowing that you have already been deeply refreshed by our Lord and that you can continue on with your work and do it WELL.

(2)

The second thing about pausing and resting is this. In taking time to rest and having our souls refreshed by God, this is the time to connect with God. In the pause, we have been given time to see what God is doing all around us. It's like taking the blinders off for a moment and to see the bigger picture. But the thing about pausing and resting, it doesn't mean that Sunday or the Sabbath is the only time to do this. We have to begin to practice during times of everyday to pause and be still and connect with our Father. Even in the scriptures, we're told that Jesus took time out of his day to pray and connect to God our Father.

There's a daily spiritual practice that is out there called the Daily Office. And don't be confused, the Daily Office isn't about an office work space or anything. Instead, it is a small devotional that you can use once, twice or even three times a day. It's designed so that when you get a chance in the day to stop and pause, there is a small devotional that you can use, so that you can focus yourself on God the Father. The idea is that we pause and be reminded that the work that we do is bigger than ourselves. And really, what we do in our everyday lives is to bring glory and honour to the Father.

(3)

The third and final thing that we can take away from this passage is that Jesus, being Lord over the Sabbath means that HE has brought the END to religion. No longer do we have to worry about the RULES of religion anymore. In the example of the Sabbath, we do not live in FEAR of the Sabbath if we “accidentally” break the rules of observing the Holy Day. Sunday, in our society is typically the day for rest. But I know of small business owners who take Mondays or even Tuesdays off. Whatever your day of rest is, the key thing to remember really, IS TO REST. The Sabbath, remember, is made of humans. It’s a gift for you and I. Please don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. Use the Sabbath for your own physical and spiritual health. Don’t feel guilty for putting your work down. The Sabbath has been gifted to you by the Father in Heaven. No longer do we have worry about rules and regulations. Friends, rest. Rest in the Lord.

Because remember what Jesus says, my yoke is easy and my burden is not hard.

Rest and be refreshed.

Rest and be rejuvenated.

Rest and be restored.

Amen.