

Rules & Hypocrisy
Luke 13:10-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
August 21, 2016 / 14th Sunday After Pentecost

Today's selection is part of an argument that has been repeated often in all the Gospels, that the early church has used in its conflicts with the synagogues over the question of Sabbath observance. And while Jesus and His Disciples observed the Sabbath, they rejected the strict legalistic interpretation.

The Commandment tells us to cease any creative activity, or anything that exercises control over the environment, on the seventh day, Saturday, as God had created for six days and ceased to create on the seventh. There are 39 activities that are specified in the Mishna, the Rabbinical oral tradition, organized into four orders: Any part of the process of making bread, clothes, leather, and construction are forbidden. Even putting out a fire is forbidden!

Since the start of the Rabbinical Age around 200AD, the exception to all these rules is if a life is in danger. In fact, oral tradition instructs that if you are unable to tell if a life is in danger, you are to assume it, and take action, just in case.

I recently learned about an Israeli NGO recognized by the UN called Zaka, which is a group of volunteers that responds to any incident of unnatural death, as paramedics if possible, but also for forensic identifications and escorts for remains. They are made up of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Bedouins, and Druze, but their core is made up of ultra-conservative observant Jews, who are exempt from military service, but still want to serve their country in some way.

They have responded in this country to 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. While in Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, the Zaka team, made up of the ultra-conservative Jews, on the Sabbath, they stopped for only a prayer, and then got back to work in the rubble, because lives were at stake. The possibility of saving a life was enough to set aside the Commandment for Sabbath observance to a person who is extremely observant. Their spokesperson responded when asked, "The Torah orders us to save lives...We are desecrating the Sabbath with pride."

So, the Rabbinical response to today's passage as permission to disregard the strict restrictions of the Sabbath is a very easy one: The woman's life was NOT in danger. It COULD have waited until the next day.

So, I looked for what else could be going on, rather than solely the Sabbath issue, which as a Commandment Level issue, is therefore assumed to be the most important issue. Well, Jesus is also calling out hypocrites here.

He is doing this because hypocrites, by definition, are not being consistent, they are following some Sabbath rules, but not others, and then try to call out Jesus for not following Sabbath rules. These owners of glass houses are throwing stones, not realizing that by judging others, they open themselves up to judgment, and then Jesus calls them out for their hypocrisy.

I really dislike hypocrisy. It was one of the big points of contention I had with my managers at Barnes & Noble, that led to much friction when I pointed out the lack of consistency in how they treated me or my cashiers.

When I am out performing my duties as a Chaplain at gatherings, I am very consistently confronted by atheists, agnostics, former Christians, and other non-Christians, because of how many who claim to be Followers of Jesus Christ, yet preach hate and hurt, inconsistent with Jesus' Gospel of Love. It is vexing that it is this type that receives the media coverage, because it is more entertaining, instead of the real churches doing good work for their communities. Good News doesn't sell well, apparently.

In these situations, I find it hard to be a witness for Christ. All that negativity and hurt. When a certain Baptist Church in Kansas, known for picketing funerals, then asks that the public respect and not protest their own funerals; or when they are led day-to-day by a woman, then release rudely worded public statements about churches with woman pastors; or when they claim the mantle of Christian, yet they do not preach Love, they show themselves to be hypocrites, and they drive people away from Jesus.

What can anyone do? Nothing directly, really. When they came to New

Haven while I was at Divinity School, I was part of the University's Graduate School Senate. The undergraduate assembly came to us and asks us to help with counter-protests. We convinced them it would just add fuel to the fire, and that the University should just ignore them. Pretend that they are not there, and do not give them an audience.

What else can you do? In such situations, I remember God's words in Deuteronomy, that God will repay. There was a similar type person in Louisiana, a politician and radio show host, who publicly called upon God to bring forth a flood to punish those he considered to be sinners. Well, his own house was flooded recently, and he claimed that God was just giving him a challenge to overcome. Right.

Personally, I make sure that I model Christ's Love for us all when I am out there as a Chaplain, and when I find myself on the spot, face-to-face with those hurt by those hypocritical ones. I want to be an example, or counter-example, if you will, of the hateful ones that they see on tv or on social media. I have found that this is an effective tactic, and it can change perceptions.

If you want to follow all the rules in the Old Testament, that is your decision, but you cannot pick and choose. That is the same hypocrisy that Jesus is calling out. Besides, Jesus says that All the Law, and All the Prophets, can be summed up as: Love God, and Love your Neighbor. Following only that commandment is consistent with Jesus and the Good News. Consider this: Can we ever go wrong following a Commandment to Love?

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God, we are grateful for Your mercy and compassion. Grant us the wisdom to recognize Your Good News and to avoid the hypocrisy, that does not preach Love, as Jesus commands us to do for You and our neighbors. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent Your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We give You thanks for all the blessings and lessons You have shared with us. May we always approach You and our neighbors with a grateful heart full of Your Love.

You have given us a world of beauty, and we have spoiled it. A world to feed us, and so many go hungry. A world of riches, and we are unwilling to share. A world to care for, and we think only of ourselves. Forgive us, gracious God, for our selfishness, every time we have no thought for others, no cares but ours. Enable us to see this world as a gift from you that can be shared, and those who live on it as our neighbours.

Be with all who need you. The distraught, the needy, the hungry, the displaced by fire or water or eviction. Be with those who struggle with addiction, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Be with the victims of violence and their loved ones. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and grant us the wisdom we need. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

Hear the prayers of our hearts, O God of justice, Your word is light and truth. Let Your face shine on us to restore us, that we may walk in Your way, seeking justice and doing good. Amen.

Psalm 103:1-8

103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits--

103:3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

103:4 who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

103:5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

103:6 The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

103:7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.