

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I begin with a disclaimer of sorts in light of the events that happened in our nation this past week. I want to begin by making something very clear due to this particular Gospel passage that is before us today. Within this Gospel text Jesus is confronting “laws” as set by the Pharisees. I want to make it very clear that I am not using the Gospel lesson to address, compare, nor comment on what has taken place this past week. I pray also that this sermon would not be placed into the context of these events that have taken place in the legal systems within our United States this past week and be used as a commentary on them, but that the Good News of Jesus Christ be at the heart of what is taken away from here today.

I do however, want to point out that what Jesus is addressing with the Pharisees is what Luther has come to call “Two Kingdoms” in that there are civil ordinances and there are divine ordinances. In this confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus, we have the Pharisees and their rules and we have Jesus and God’s laws...or we can say, civil and divine ordinances. These ordinances are defined in the *Augsburg Confession* and in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* within *Article XVI* of both documents. And what they explain very simply is that if I, as a Christian, get pulled over for speeding, it is not my right to say to the officer, “You are not being a good Christian by arresting me, you should simply forgive me.” No, he is absolutely being a good Christian by arresting me because I have broken the law. At the same time, I cannot say that I have salvation because I have followed the law of this land and I have never been arrested. This is exactly what Jesus is confronting today in our Gospel.

The Pharisees have written and established rules they call laws and they have decided these rules will make them righteous before God. In this Gospel lesson Jesus is bringing to light the misuse of the “law” by challenging the Pharisees who see their law as God’s Law. Jesus then very cleverly goads the Pharisees into seeing that their law is not God’s law.

Before we get into the workings of this Gospel text, I want to look a little closer at the Pharisees and how their understanding of Law and Gospel plays out today. I don’t think you have to study the Gospels too closely to see the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Gospels portray the Pharisees as opponents of Jesus. And in turn, we too become hostile toward the Pharisees. Not only did the Pharisees see themselves as the ultimate religious people among the Jews during Christ’s life on earth, the Jewish people saw the Pharisees in the same light as they saw themselves...very self-righteous.

The Pharisees assumed that in order for them or anyone to maintain God’s law, they have devised their own laws to prevent them from breaking God’s law. It was their law that gave them the authority within the temple and among the Jews *and* the Gentiles. And what heightened the tension and hostility between them and Jesus was his claim to be the very Son of God. Furthermore, the Pharisees considered Jesus’s claim of oneness with God as blasphemous and a threat to their authority within the Temple. The Pharisees saw their righteousness in their *external* compliance with their law that prevented them from breaking God’s law. Whereas, Jesus taught an internal compliance, in that God looks at the heart and the faith that is within that heart. The Pharisees became very agitated with Jesus because he ignored their numerous and elaborate, man-made but petty rules that they had devised for interpreting the law of God. They

went as far as elevating their laws to the level of Scripture, so that to break one of their rules was to violate the law of God itself. In other words, they operated by their own laws and their own understanding of God's laws according to their likes and dislikes. These rules not only obscured the intent of God's law, in some cases their laws actually violated God's law.

The Pharisees' rules established an external righteousness and not an internal faith in and love for God. And here is where we find Jesus this morning in this Gospel lesson, pointing out the flaws and challenging the Pharisees to see their flaws. In this passage today, Jesus asks:

"Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4b)

This is the question that led me to look closer at the Pharisees. Understanding the nature of the Pharisees opened my eyes to see the full intent of this Gospel lesson, especially when juxtaposed with the context of today's culture along with our own Christian arrogance and I then asked: do we do more harm by attempting to do good? Rather, do we do more harm attempting to be what we think a "good" Christian is? Or, do we do more harm in our quest for our own self-righteousness? Do we really understand and recognize that righteousness and salvation are not earned or established by our works, our rules, and our regulations?

The activity of Jesus in this Gospel passage today draws much attention to the Pharisees, the disciples, the crowds, and even all of us because Jesus is causing conflict in both the civic ordinances and the divine ordinances. And when we factor in all that is happening in this Gospel lesson, as well as our assumption about the grace of God, we too can experience tension, agitation, anger, questioning, power plays, awe, amazement, and even unbelief. And we quickly learn in this lesson that Jesus + Sabbath + our assumptions = conflict.<sup>1</sup>

So, as we listen to the close of this passage today:

<sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (Mark 3:6)

From these words, we find ourselves once again on the side of Jesus thinking, how dare those Pharisees. And in the all the shortcomings of the Pharisees, as well as all the tension, agitation, anger, questioning, we claim our righteousness because we would never be like these Pharisees and treat our buddy Jesus that way.

We really dislike the Pharisees...and this lesson today only solidifies this within us because we really don't like their threats against Jesus as well as all their rules and laws that seem to merely elevate themselves. We also dislike them because Jesus seems to be constantly challenging them and debating them and we take the side of Jesus because we know he is right...we might not fully understand why, we just assume he is, so we side with Jesus. Because of our own arrogance we are able to recognize theirs and we dislike the arrogance of the Pharisees because we are quick to ask, who left them in charge?! After all, we have over two-thousand years of hindsight to perfect our own legalistic ways that allow us to recognize that their legalistic ways do not make them better than Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Van Harn, Roger E.. *The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Third Readings: Gospels*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. The commentary based on the appointed Gospel reading for the Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, page 193.

And so it is that we are on the side of Jesus because we like him, we like his way more than the Pharisees, and besides, Jesus gets us...he loves us and has made that known. Jesus is our friend and:

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful,  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
(so) Take it to the Lord in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, Jesus is our friend...some might even claim that Jesus is our buddy and because he is, Jesus would never challenge us the way he challenges the Pharisees. Jesus is our buddy who can look past all our faults and we know if he were here with us right now, he would agree with us and be happy with us as we sit safely in our church away from all the sin and evil out there. Because of this, Jesus would say it's OK for us to do this or that, after all, we read our Bibles, we know all about the rules and regulations and we are certainly not like those Pharisees...we are tight with our buddy. We can hum "What a friend we have in Jesus" while we study this lesson and look closely at the Pharisees and point out what is so wrong and our buddy Jesus will certainly tell us we are so correct. Because Jesus is our buddy, we understand God and God's law in the context of our relationship with our buddy Jesus. In other words, our buddy would see the world out there the same way we do and He will condemn those we dislike and all those who have wronged us...we know all about our buddy and He will condemn those we dislike along with those who disagree with us.

If we only come away with more hatred and anger toward the Pharisees and others around us today... then what has the Gospel taught us today? Right now in the midst of all we face in our lives today how does this Gospel lesson inform us of the Good News? Is the Good News for us today encouraging more hatred toward others?

The Good News for us begins by understanding just how disruptive the presence of God in Jesus Christ really is...not just for the Pharisees, but for us as well! Because we claim Jesus as our buddy, we assume then that God will not disrupt us in any way...but God does. Because Jesus is our buddy, we assume that God will dislike all that we dislike, God will condemn according to "my" understanding. Because we feel so close to God, we assume to know how God will judge others, or how God works and even thinks...or we know that because we have done thus and such God will find favor with us and if I do this and that, even knowing salvation comes through grace through faith, I have done so much good I know then how salvation works and if others have faith like mine God will find favor in others as well.

In this understanding or this thinking about God, we will find God's disruptive nature destroying all our assumptions, and all our "good" Christian attitudes. God will disrupt our Pharisaic ways

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<sup>2</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, ELW* hymn number 742, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2006.

with a grace and love that is far greater than all that we can even begin to jam into our Pharisaic ways.

Today, this lesson teaches us that in our “good” Christian ways... in our self-centered rules of faith established through our prejudices, our assumptions, and our hatreds, all make us out to be modern day Pharisees. And God through Jesus Christ will disrupt and overturn our ways simply with grace and love. Each and every human being is as St. Paul reminds the church in Corinth, a clay vessel that God has shone His light of grace and love upon. But like any clay vessel, over time we all begin to crack and show ware through our sin but this is exactly where God shines the light of the knowledge of glory. Listen again to the Good News from St. Paul:

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.  
(2 Cor 4:5-11)

The light of the knowledge of glory is the very faith poured into us through the Holy Spirit. It is a faith that enables each of us to know that salvation and righteousness is not ours to earn, it is an internal gift shown to us and established in us through the love God gives to us in Jesus Christ.

I said earlier that the Pharisees saw their righteousness in their *external* compliance with their law, but Jesus shows us all that God looks at the heart. Today God's profound grace disrupts our understanding of a simple piece of bread and wine with the internal assurance of salvation through our faith in body and blood of Jesus Christ. A Holy Meal of grace and salvation that fills NOT our physical body, rather, our very soul with the assurance of eternal life in God's glorious kingdom.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*