

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST June 2, 2024

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY and SEASON'S THEMES

Several times in these Sundays after Pentecost we'll hear and read about somebody asking "Just who IS this Jesus?"—The tone of voice shifts. Sometimes the question comes from awe and amazement. Other times the question conveys confusion. In today's Gospel text the tone is decidedly, "Just who does this guy think he is, anyway?" If we're honest we have said or felt that question "who is Jesus" in all of these ways.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty and ever-living God, throughout time you free the oppressed, heal the sick and make whole all that you have made. Look with compassion on the world wounded by sin, and by your power restore us to wholeness of life, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen

GOSPEL: Mark 2:23—3:6

23One sabbath he was going through the grain fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" 25And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." 27Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

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Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the

sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

SERMON

Imagine Jesus showing up in our congregation or at synod convention in a couple of weeks and saying something like “sell all you have and give it to the poor”. Yeah. No. What if Jesus would rattle us saying we need to completely invest ourselves in living out the beatitudes? What if he chastised us for excluding people that we should include—there’s a good question as Pride Month begins and our churches and synods look to build supportive relationships with the LGBTQ community. What if Jesus were to command we forgive the specific enemies we don’t want to forgive? Keep your reactions, thoughts and feelings in mind as we consider today’s Gospel reading.

For more than a thousand years, the Pharisees embraced Sabbath and took seriously God’s command to keep it holy. When Moses introduced the sabbath, ex-slaves accustomed to 24/7 work likely didn’t know what to do with themselves. Just the point. Don’t do...just be. Eat, rest, take delight in your family. The gift of Sabbath was for everybody and even the animals.

Sabbath is about liberation for everyone. Every one! Even today? Even for a person with a withered hand who is attending Sabbath services?

Mark says some of the religious leaders expect Jesus to do the wrong thing by healing a man’s withered hand so they could accuse him. So the relationship Jesus has with these particular Pharisees has already degenerated.

Everybody knows the Sabbath is about preserving and enhancing life, so the answer to Jesus' question about doing good on the Sabbath seems comically self evident—why even ask? Yet when Jesus asks, nobody speaks.

Mark's depicts Jesus as having fire in his eyes, a scowl on his face and grief in his spirit. Why is Jesus so mad? Is it the silence after his question? Is it inertia in the presence one with a physical disability that effectively cuts them off from earning a living much less fully participating in society?

Mark says Jesus grieves the hardness of heart. The Bible depicts the heart as the centre of choosing, action and will. This group of Pharisees has dug in—they have set their “Sabbath violator's trap” for Jesus.

He knows it's a trap. He springs it anyway because somebody needs healing. Someone who likely couldn't work to earn a living or fully participate in community can now do both. Sounds like liberation and that's a big chunk of the joy of Sabbath. That should be a good thing, right?

Evidently it's enough to get two groups who feud like the Hatfields and the McCoys to immediately (one of 144 times Mark says something happened immediately) conspire to murder Jesus. Not a good look for keeping the sabbath.

Vexing questions remain. By what and whose authority does Jesus— without rabbi credential papers— declare forgiveness and start healing people on a day meant for rest? By whose authority does Jesus get to tell the rest of us what the Sabbath is supposed to be for?

You might expect the quick and easy answer. Instead consider the ramifications of living these questions. Will it come down to setting our hearts on the greatest commandment to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbour as ourselves?

