

When Does Compassion Trump the Law?

Scripture: Luke 13:10 – 17

5/30/21

During Jesus' day, the temple was still the main place for Jews to congregate and worship on important religious holidays. However, the local synagogue was the place where the Jewish people would gather for the reading of the Law. The local synagogue was a house of study, the study of Jewish Law. Jesus was a regular attendee of the local synagogue in Capernaum for almost three years, he was a good Jewish man!

I walked in the synagogue in Capernaum and I could feel Jesus' presence there! Can you picture Jesus sitting among other teachers of the day; listening, asking questions, reading scripture, and interpreting scripture? I can, how about you? I can see Jesus in the local synagogue listening, questioning, reading, and interpreting. Our scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke was such a day. It is entitled in my Bible - A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath.

The crippled woman had come to the synagogue for reasons unknown to us. Maybe she wanted to hear scripture read or maybe she wanted to hear scripture interpreted? Maybe she was looking to be healed or maybe a family member had simply brought her along? Who knows!

Whatever her reason for coming to the local synagogue, it is interesting that the woman makes no request of Jesus to heal her. She is not the one who approaches Jesus. Jesus calls her over to him. Jesus sees her and calls out healing to her.

In other healing stories, we hear that someone's faith has helped to heal them, but it is interesting in this story that there is no mention of this woman's faith before or after Jesus heals her. Jesus takes the initiative and says to her - *'Woman, you are set free from your sickness!'*

But when the woman straightens up and begins to praise God after Jesus lays hands upon her, the synagogue leaders immediately call foul on Jesus! Their objection is based on the Law, the 4th Commandment which is remember and rest on the Sabbath. I can hear their officiating whistles blow - Foul on Jesus! (Blow a whistle)

In Jesus' day, there were certain codes of conduct and laws of appropriate behavior on the Sabbath. The Ten Commandments have been there for a long time! The Ten Commandments were meant to help the new & free Israelite nation become the people of God by living in ways that honored God and built human relationships. Through the centuries, the teachers of the law added and interpreted the Law so that they became legal requirements.

By the time of Jesus, there were many things that one could or could not do on the Sabbath. Their interpretation of the Sabbath Law was that healing on the Sabbath is allowed only in critical cases, not chronic conditions! Foul on Jesus! (Blow the whistle)

Jesus dodges the whole issue of healing on the Sabbath and he focuses on the issue of meeting human needs. Jesus focuses on releasing someone from bondage and he suggest that in doing so, he honors the Sabbath and keeps the 4th Commandment. Jesus ask those who question his actions to reason with him. Jesus says - *'If you would do something for your animals on the Sabbath, would you not also do it for another human being? If an animal were bound, would you not untie it from a post and lead it to water on the Sabbath? Surely what you would do for an ox, you would also do for another human being?'*

Concern over the suffering of fellow human beings takes precedence over obligations related to keeping the Sabbath. Compassion always trumps law! Let me repeat that - Compassion always trumps law!

Jesus challenges the religious community and us to think about what keeping the Sabbath really means. Does it mean just following the prescribed order of worship each week? Does it mean following the ceremony to the letter of the law no matter what happens?

Jesus knows that religious people can be the most rigid kind of folks when it comes to following a prescribed way of practicing our religion. Jesus is not abolishing the Law of Moses, but he is helping the people in the synagogue better understand how to apply the law. Compassion always trumps law!

Jesus also knows that we can be the most rigid kind of folks when it comes to following a prescribed way of practicing our religion. Jesus is not abolishing the Law of Moses, but he is helping us better understand how to apply the law. Compassion always trumps law!

The laws were given to help enhance life, not stifle it. Compassion always trumps law. Compassion will be the rule for all who follow Jesus. Jesus performs an act of service for this crippled woman that has been overdue for 18 years. The announcement of the good news is an invitation to celebrate. Jesus confers on the crippled woman a status of dignity by calling her a daughter of Abraham. The laying on of hands was a conferral of blessing.

We have our own written and unwritten laws. Christian churches have made rules, laws, regulations, and other prohibitions to try to protect the Sabbath. Laws have been passed to force people to go to church, but Jesus suggests is that the real idea behind the Sabbath is a positive affirmation of humanity. We have made rest into doing nothing, remember compassion trumps law. We have made the Sabbath into a restrictive and unpleasant thing, not a freeing and joyous thing.

Jesus reminds us that Sabbath is made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. The commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy does not give us exact instructions on how to do it, but Jesus reminds us that the command was not given to stifle life. God's concern for Sabbath keeping is for the health and well-being of God's people.

Jesus is bold in taking the initiative to release this crippled woman knowing he would be questioned. We may wonder if we would do something that we knew was right, even if in doing it, we knew it would probably create a crisis or a controversy.

Whether we admit it or not, every church has procedures and protocols for what is supposed to happen at church. Breaking with these and doing something to loosen the bonds for human need is not always popular, but it seems to be Jesus' way of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Compassion always trumps law!

The founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) broke away from the Presbyterian Church over rules and regulations for the communion table. At that time, the rule for communion in the Presbyterian Church was to receive communion, you had to reach three criteria's – member of that Presbyterian Church, a regular attending of that Presbyterian Church, and a member in good standing meaning a good steward or giver of that Presbyterian Church.

Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone, three of our four founding fathers, broke away from the Presbyterian Church because they wanted to give everybody communion.

And so we gather at this communion table, the Lord's Table, to take part in communion because we are the Disciples of Christ