

“Restore”

Mark 2:27-28; 3: 1-6

We continue our Summer Series by taking a look at what the practice of Sabbath keeping looks like for us as people of faith. Over the last few weeks, we have talked about how Sabbath keeping is an invitation to slow down and to find rest. We have talked about how Sabbath keeping is an opportunity to reflect on God’s work. We have talked about how Sabbath keeping is more than just taking a time out from our busy lives. It is also a framework, a mindset through which we reclaim God’s purpose and intention of goodness and grace for all of God’s children.

We have even talked about Sabbath Keeping as a form of justice making, as a way for us to respond to the injustices around us by centering us in the promises of God, by not allowing us to succumb to fear. Sabbath Keeping becomes an act of justice as it invites us to refocus our attention on the hurt and brokenness that fills our world, as it encourages us to envision ways healing and wholeness can happen for all of God’s creation.

Which brings us to our text today. This is our second healing story in this Sabbath series conversation. This first one being from the Gospel of Luke where

we learned that Jesus heals the bent over woman. And now in the Gospel of Mark, we hear the story of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand.

Both of these stories happen on the Sabbath day. Both of these stories happen when Jesus is in the synagogue. Both of these stories tell us that because of Jesus' actions, the powers that be became unhappy with Jesus and began to take a more vested and suspicious look into Jesus and his ministry. But more importantly, both of these stories tell us that Jesus acted without asking. Jesus acted without asking permission. Jesus acted without waiting to make sure he had the committee's permission to do so. Something we sometimes forget to do as people of faith when faced with the complexities of our world.

That being said, I find it interesting that as we read this story, this story that is titled: the healing of the man with the withered hand, we discover that the healing of this man is not really the focus of the story at all. In fact, all we are really told of the healing is that Jesus tells the man to stand up. Jesus says a few words to the Pharisees and then boom, the guy is healed, almost as if this detail was an afterthought of Mark's that was added later.

In this story, the author of Mark doesn't focus on the healing. What he does focus on is the question that Jesus asks. What he does focus on is the Pharisees response or lack of response to Jesus' question. In this story, what is important to

the author of Mark is how this man is restored to his community and for Mark, that is why this story of healing and hope needs to be told.

Let me explain:

When we take a look at this text, unfortunately we miss some of Mark's more creative authorship because it gets lost in translation. So for us to really understand what is going on in this text, we have to go back a few verses and see this story in context.

In just the verses before, Jesus and his disciples are walking along in a grain field. And the disciples begin to pluck some grain. We aren't told why they do this. Maybe they are hungry. Maybe they are bored. Maybe this was the Judean version of Pokeman Go. We don't know. What we do know is that after seeing the disciples pluck the grain, the Pharisees pose a question to Jesus, to which he responds with a very pointed statement. In response to the Pharisees' concern that his disciples were breaking the law by doing work on the Sabbath, Jesus says, (and I quote) "The Sabbath was made for humans and not humans for the Sabbath. Jesus then goes on to say: the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Now this may not mean much to us but let me just say, these are fighting words. Jesus has just claimed a higher power and a higher authority and the Pharisees don't like. Jesus has just basically said that because he is here,

everything is different, that with his presence, a new age has been ushered in and in this new age, all the things that we hold as Truth need to be re-evaluated, this time re-evaluated through the lens of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus has just basically said to the Pharisees and to the disciples how we used to operate doesn't work anymore and we need to be ready to change.

As I said, these are fighting words and they didn't sit really well with the ones who were in charge at that time.

So is it any wonder that the Pharisees started waiting and watching Jesus, just waiting for him to do something, for something to happen so that they could accuse him of doing something wrong.

Which brings us back to our text today. As the author of Mark tells it, it was a normal day at the synagogue. Nothing unusual going on. People were there for the Sabbath day. People were there to worship God. It was just a normal day at church.

Then Jesus sees this man with a withered hand and it becomes a teachable moment for all. Jesus asks this man to stand up, to come to the center where everyone can see him.

Once again, the thing we miss because it gets lost in the translation is that Jesus's command to this man has resurrection overtones to it. Jesus' very words

hint at the coming restoration, to the coming healing, to the coming wholeness for this man, and yes maybe even for all the people of God.

Jesus asks this man to stand up and then just when we expect Jesus to do something, he does something different. Instead of healing this man, Jesus turns to the Pharisees and asks them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?”

Once again, this seems odd for us. After all, this isn’t the first time Jesus has healed someone in the synagogue. This isn’t even the first time Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath day. So why doesn’t Jesus just heal this man now? What is stopping him? Why does Jesus ask this question? What are we missing here?

Now before we get too upset or confused by Jesus’ actions, let’s take another look at what Jesus is really asking the Pharisees, what Jesus is really asking us as modern day followers of Jesus Christ.

We have to understand that there is really no good way for the Pharisees to answer Jesus’ question. If they say it is a good thing to do heal this man, to do good on the Sabbath, then well, they become part of Jesus’ team, something they don’t want to do especially since they believe all Jesus is doing is disrupting the order of everything and stirring up trouble.

On the other hand, if they said, it was lawful to do harm on the Sabbath, then they come off as being seen as the biggest meanies on the block. So how do they answer...Or better yet, how would we answer that question? How would we as people of faith answer Jesus' question?

Take a few moments and think about that.

We all know how we think we would answer that question, but let's face it, this question captures one of the biggest struggles we have as people of faith.

Here's why I say that: We all know the "rules" when it comes to our faith, when it comes to religion, when it comes to living out our calling as disciples of Christ. We supposedly know what the "right" behavior is and we know what is not acceptable. We supposedly know who is in and who is out. We even know where to turn to in our Bibles to see what we are supposed to do and what we are not supposed to do as the people of God. So, when it comes to our faith, and practices of our faith, we know the "rules" or at least we think we do.

So back to Jesus' question, if everyone already knows the rules, then why is there so much debate in the wider Church on who is welcome and who is not. Why is there so much division in the wider Church on who is right and who is wrong. As people of faith, we supposedly know the rules, right? So why so much debate?

The answer to that, is, as people of faith, we know how we think we would answer Jesus' question but when it comes right down to the moment when we come face to face with the complexities of our world, let's be honest, we know how we would really answer Jesus' question. And I'm not sure we like facing that bit of Truth.

Because more often than not, we know that we use the rules to control. We know we use the rules to get our own way. We know that we use the rules to keep ourselves in power. More often than not, even though we would like to say that we would offer a different answer than the Pharisees, that we would not remain silent, more often than not, when faced with the complexities of our world, we find ourselves in the same position, sitting in silence, frustrated because someone is trying to break the rules.

More often than not, we perceive those "others" as people just stirring up trouble, as people who have come along and are trying to tell us, can you believe, trying to tell us, that the way we are operating doesn't work anymore, especially now that the presence of the Kingdom of God is in our midst.

But you see, the presence of the Kingdom of God changes everything as people of faith. It changes how we talk. It changes how we act. It changes how we relate to one another. It even changes how we interpret and practice our faith.

As disciples of Christ, no longer can we say we are just following the rules when we come face to face with the hurting and brokenness that is filling our world. Everything has been changed because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And as ones who worship a risen Savior, we are called to recapture, to reclaim the heart and the Spirit of the rules. We are called to understand that the very presence of the Kingdom of God invites us to reinterpret, to re-evaluate everything, this time allowing God's compassion and God's love to be our guide.

For Jesus, this act of healing, this seemingly odd question posed to the Pharisees, posed to the disciples, even posed to us as modern day followers of Jesus is not really about following the rules. It is about recapturing the essence of the character of God. It is about living out the heart and Spirit of the gift that is Sabbath renewal, a gift that invites all of us, all of God's children, all of God's creation, to be restored and to be made whole. For Jesus, this healing, this question, this teachable moment, is not just about making this man's hand better. It is about finding ways to restore this man to life, to restore him as part of the community, to restore him as a child of God made whole.

For Jesus, and for us as his followers, it is about recapturing the understanding that it doesn't matter what the "rules" may be, Jesus knew, we

know, that living out our faith, living out our lives fully in the presence of the Kingdom of God knowing is always about being the person God created us to be, the person God calls us to be and more importantly, the person that this world needs us to be. As disciples of Christ, living out our faith, living fully in the presence of the Kingdom of God means knowing that is always the right time to bring someone back to life.

So today and all days, may we find the strength and the courage to re-evaluate everything, this time allowing God's compassion, God's love to be our guide. And in doing so, may we always find ways to restore all of God's children to life. Amen.