

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Septuagesima Sunday, January 28, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 19:1, 144, 385:1-4, 508:1-2.

Lessons: Deut. 5:12-15, 1 Corinthians 12:29 – 13:13, Matthew 12:9-14.

Sermon Text: Luke 6:6-11

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week you heard about the Pharisees accusing Jesus' disciples of breaking what they claimed were Sabbath laws but which were just man-made rules. When he reproached them then, they were even more upset with Jesus and resolved to have him killed. The hatred of the Pharisees was intensified with each new defeat. A week ago they had received a well-deserved rebuke based upon Scriptural grounds.

The evangelists do not record any answer of the Pharisees to Jesus on that day. They refused to learn from Jesus. They were determined to turn the admiration of the people into suspicion and then into opposition. They kept looking for more opportunities to discredit him. And, of course, they had another chance on the following Sabbath day, when Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. Today we see

JESUS HEALING AND CONTINUING TO TEACH

- 1. Jesus heals a man and**
- 2. Teaches reverence for human life and**
- 3. Makes the unbelieving Pharisees even angrier with him.**

On the previous Sabbath – which just happens to be our last Sunday sermon, Jesus had shown the real meaning of Sabbath and Sabbath-rest.

Today, on the Sabbath day again, Jesus went into a synagogue as was his custom. This was the place of Sabbath worship in Jewish communities, although sacrifices were to be made at the temple in Jerusalem. The leaders of a local synagogue would often invite suitable men to read the Scriptures and to teach. Jesus was teaching and we can be sure that he was teaching the truth of God's Word.

A man with a shriveled hand was there in the synagogue as one of the worshiping congregation. This man's hand, his right hand, was withered or shriveled up. He was unable to use this hand. This would have made it difficult or perhaps even impossible for him to do meaningful work. And the Jewish society in which Jesus lived did not have all the safety nets we have today, such as what we call "welfare", medical assistance, unemployment compensation, Old Age Survivors And Disability Insurance – Social Security.

But the Pharisees and teachers of the law were also there. These were leaders of the Jewish religion who interpreted and explained the law and unfortunately added human rules to the Old Testament laws. Any teaching they did was different from that which Jesus did, who as Matthew wrote, ***"taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."*** Matthew 7:29 (NIV) They were there, baiting him, trying to get him to do something for which they would then have cause to imprison him and even have him murdered. They wanted to get rid of him, to kill him.

They wanted to accuse Jesus so they had some reason to get rid of him. They had already decided to find some way of silencing him. They wanted to find something they could accuse him with in which he was disobeying the government, or at least something in which he was plainly disobeying their religious rules. They

were watching Jesus carefully. If the Lord would heal the man on the Sabbath day, they thought they would be able to make a case against him from their interpretations of the law.

But Jesus was omniscient and knew what was in their hearts. He knew the hypocritical reasoning of their hearts and their thoughts, even before they spoke them. He knew the uncharitableness and the unbelief of their hearts. Last Sabbath day he had told the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The greatest law finding its application here is the law of love. The Pharisees did not understand or practice the divine principle recorded in Hosea ***“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”*** Hosea 6:6 (KJV) The Pharisees sacrifice mercy to human rules which they added to God’s Sabbath. All the sacrifices made in meticulous observance of the letter of the Law cannot be placed on a level with mercy and love, which is the fulfillment of the Law. Paul writes to the Galatian Christians: ***“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*** Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

One writer said: A heart that realizes the need of one’s neighbor and cheerfully helps in obtaining everything that is needed is engaged in a higher form of worship than that which upholds a rigorous legalism.

Jesus uses the man with the shriveled hand as an example and asks them the questions: ***“which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”*** Should one do good or evil? Should one save or destroy life? He is asking: what is more important? To do what God really says or merely to obey man’s rules which are claimed to be God’s rules? Jesus sets God’s mercy against man’s rules – and God’s mercy wins.

We must remember that Jesus came to do good, good for all men. The greatest good he did was, of course, to redeem all men from eternal death. Jesus came to save life, not to destroy it. He tells us in John’s gospel: ***“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*** John 10:10 (KJV)

What were the results of this day’s activities? They sought to kill him.

Hypocrisy and the appearance of piety may lead people to try to cover up the most obvious lack of love and mercy. In this case, the appearances of trying to seem like good people led to mortal hatred of their only possible Savior from all their sins.

The answer to Jesus’ questions should have been simple and obvious, but the Pharisees and teachers of the law had no good answer and they gave no answer. If they agree with Jesus, their own actions would be condemned and they would lose their case. If they disagreed with Jesus, the people would turn away from them toward Jesus. They could see that they would be criticized whatever answer they gave, so they just remained silent.

Jesus acted with the greatest patience and kindness. He had tried to win his enemies by persuasion and love. His question to them is: Is it the right and proper thing to do good, to save life, to help one’s neighbor on the Sabbath? Should people feel this as their obligation? Or can it be possible that anyone should want to advocate the doing of evil, the destroying of life, even on the Sabbath day?

Today, the answer from unbelievers is much more obvious and blatant than in this one example from Jesus’ life on earth. Today men are only too anxious to do evil rather than good. Not only is there continually, all around us in the world, continual breaking of laws, both human and divine, but there is also writing and implementing of laws in direct contradiction to God’s laws, including the law of love. Abortion – murder, total lack of respect for human life before birth – is completely legal, according to the laws of the land. Breaking of God’s command that marriage should be one man and one woman for life is completely legal and flaunted, even in our country, which some used to claim was a Christian land. Not so any longer, if it ever really was!

The omission of a good deed, the neglect of some act of kindness, is, in fact, equal to actual murder in a case where the personal well-being of another human is concerned. Conscience should tell every human that on the Sabbath, as well as on any other day, deeds of mercy are not only permitted, but very distinctly commanded. Luther’s explanation of the commandment “You shall not murder” – “Thou shalt not kill” tells us that we should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and be a friend to him in every bodily need.

But the Pharisees here deliberately hardened their hearts. Just because their conscience condemned them before this Teacher, they were not going to give him the satisfaction of agreeing with him. And so they stubbornly refused to answer.

As one sent from God who wants people to repent of their sins, Jesus would have been deeply grieved over the stubbornness, the hardness, the blindness of their hearts.

Because of a long resistance to the grace and Spirit of God, their hearts had become callous. By a long opposition to the light of God, they became dark in their understanding, they were blinded by the deceitfulness of sin. Because they had a long practice of doing evil, they had cut themselves off from any union with God, the fountain of spiritual life. Being dead in trespasses and sins, they were incapable of any rebirth except through the miraculous power of God.

Matthew reports that Jesus ***“said to them, ‘If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’”*** Matthew 12:11-12 (NIV)

Then Jesus simply healed the man. There was no dramatic show of healing him, but ***“He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He did so, and his hand was completely restored.”***

But the Pharisees ***“were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.”*** The Pharisees didn’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath.

The failure of this ploy to trap Jesus angered the Pharisees beyond all reasonableness. They had enough. Without waiting for further teaching, they left the synagogue. Their minds were made up as to their course of action. It remained only to find ways and means to carry out their design. It was not so much the fact that their supposedly orthodox Sabbath-keeping had received a severe attack from Jesus and that, in their opinion, the Sabbath had been broken by the miracle of healing, but that the miracle brought fame to Jesus. Then, too, they had been unable to answer his simple questions without making their own position indefensible.

It was, then, in brief, nothing but vengeful spite that moved them. Mark's gospel tells us that ***“Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”*** Mark 3:6 (NIV)

They sought allies and chose the Herodians. This was a strange alliance, since the Pharisees and the Herodians were natural enemies. The Herodians, a political party, were favorable toward Greek customs and Roman law. But the Pharisees, a religious group, hated everything about foreign culture and wanted to reestablish a purely Jewish way of life. Although these two groups had no love for each other, they were willing to work together to get rid of Jesus, whom they both considered a dangerous enemy.

The Herodians might easily be influenced against Christ if the Pharisees would only point out the growing influence of Jesus over the common people, who might soon be ready to hail him as the promised Messiah. So these two parties, otherwise not the best of friends, readily agreed to seek how they might destroy Jesus. Hypocrisy may drive people that they try to cover the most obvious lack of love and mercy, even mortal hatred and enmity, with pious appearances and practices.

But the terrible fact is that the Pharisees and those who reject him won’t benefit from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. That is plain from Mark’s gospel: ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark 16:16 (NIV) Yet we must remember that the anger of Jesus is always directed against the transgression, against the sin. For sinners the Lord has only the feeling of deepest sorrow and sympathy.

And how can we make application to ourselves? From the enemies of Jesus we see the example and warning not to ignore Jesus or to reject him. May we never fall into the trap of apparent holiness – hypocrisy – as did the Pharisees. We also pray: let faith lead to works of love and charity. Let us look to Jesus for spiritual healing – the forgiveness of sins and the hope and assurance of eternal life. Let us also look to Jesus for the physical healing he is capable of, always praying, “if it be thy will, O Lord.” Amen.