

Pastor Writes

Greetings to you all. We are now in the fourth Sunday after Pentecost and we will be meditating on the theme, 'The Spiritual freedom which we have in Christ.' One of the key things we see in the life of Jesus is that, he always sets people free from all kinds of bondages. He reinterprets scriptures and teaches the people the actual intent of a passage. The Pharisees and the scribes had turned the scriptures into a legalistic document which put huge burdens on ordinary people rather than setting them free. In the gospel reading this morning we look at two such incidents which took place on the Sabbath.

In the first incident Jesus and his disciples were walking through the grain fields. As they were walking, his disciples plucked the heads of grains. The Pharisees who witnessed this were offended. They felt the disciples had broken the law of the Sabbath, which prohibited them from doing any work on that day. The principle of Sabbath keeping, was agreed upon by all the Jews, though there were problems over what it meant in practice. The Old Testament tells us that it was to be a time of rest together with the injunction that no work must be done. However, the Pharisees developed an extensive set of laws to leave nothing to chance. At its heart lay 39 prohibited acts and one of them was, 'reaping'. The setting seems close to Capernaum because we see them returning back to the Synagogue. The fields would have been entirely wheat or barley. Plucking grain from another's field was allowed, but this fell within the clauses of work that was prohibited on the Sabbath. Harvesting on the Sabbath is explicitly forbidden in Exodus (34: 21).

Jesus answers them by giving an example of David and his men. When they were hungry they went to Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the Presence while it was not lawful for anyone but the priest to eat it. In the incident mentioned, we notice that though the Sabbath is not mentioned, the bread of Presence was always removed on the Sabbath (Leviticus 24:8). The argument is that if David and his men broke the Sabbath for the sake of human need, how much more can Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath work for the good of human beings on the Sabbath. He tells them that the value of human life takes precedence over Sabbath law. Jesus shows that Sabbath was made for human beings not human beings for the Sabbath.

In the second incident Jesus enters the synagogue and heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus asks those who were gathered in the synagogue whether it was lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm, to save life or to kill? The people around were silent and Jesus grieves at the hardness of their hearts and asks the man to stretch out his hands and heals him. The Pharisees went out and consulted with the Herodians as to how they could kill him.

In both incidents Jesus shows himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath. The Lord had asked them to keep the Sabbath as day of rest, set aside to remember God and all that He has done for them. However, the Pharisees went to the extent of making numerous laws to make sure that this law would not be broken. They had forgotten the spirit of the law and were keeping it legalistically. They had completely missed the point to the extent that they were upset when the man with a withered hand was healed on a Sabbath.

What kind of Sabbath do we practice? Is our worship and keeping of God's commands a slavish, legalistic obedience which acts as a huge burden to us, or do we see God's laws giving us spiritual freedom? In Christ we have been given the spiritual freedom and therefore we are called to keep the spirit or the law rather than the letter of the law with regards of the Sabbath. For the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. May we truly rejoice in the