

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 3, 2018

“Love is the Answer.”

Mark 2:23-3:6

A veteran senior angel was giving a brand new freshman angel a tour of the heavens. The freshman angel was wide-eyed and awe-struck as he saw the majesty and wonder of God’s incredible universe.

When they came to the Milky Way, the senior angel said to the freshman angel: “Come over here son...I want to show you something special... Look down there! That tiny planet is called Earth. It looks rather insignificant from here, doesn’t it? It looks so small, so unimportant...but something quite remarkable happened some years ago. The people of earth had gotten off the track a bit. They were missing the whole point of their existence... They were missing the meaning of life. So, God sent his only Son into that world to save them and turn them around and teach them what he meant like to be for them on Earth.”

“Wow! That’s amazing!” said the freshman angel. “You mean to tell me that God’s Son actually visited that little planet! How pleased the people of Earth must have been to receive him. I can just imagine that they must have had a great celebration for him on Earth.”

“No,” said the senior angel quietly. Then with tears in his eyes he said, “No...they tried to kill him! They were so rigidly wrapped up in their old ways of doing things that when he presented some new ideas...they resented him...and they tried to silence him!” Blinded by the old, they missed the new...the Lord was in that place...and they did not know it!

How easy it is to fall into this trap! How easy it is to become so paralyzed by our usual ways of doing things that threaten the life out of us. How easy it is to become so close-minded that we are blind to any kind of new truth! Blinded by the forms, we miss the force. Blinded by our rituals, we miss our reason for being. Blinded by our narrowness, we miss God’s nearness. Blinded by the old, we miss the new!

We see an example of this in Mark 3... Jesus is already a “marked man.” As early as Mark 3, the orthodox leaders of the Jews are already out to get him. Already, they have clashed... the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests are so threatened by Jesus that they are watching him...looking for a way to trap him and trip him up and do him in.

Jesus goes into the synagogue on the Sabbath. It was his custom to be in church on this holy day...and he would not be frightened off by nervous but powerful authority figures. They were there! In the synagogue that day there was a “watch-dog group...” a team from the Sanhedrin. They saw Jesus as a trouble maker and they were to keep an eye on him. No one could miss them, but, in the synagogue...the front seats were the seats of honor...and they were sitting there... in the most prominent seats. It was the duty of the Sanhedrin to deal with anyone who was likely to mislead the people... so they were there that day...not to worship or to learn. They were there to scrutinize Jesus, to watch critically his very action, and to listen cautiously and cynically to his every word.

Now in the synagogue that day there was a man with a withered hand. His hand was paralyzed. The Greek word used here to describe the condition of his hand suggests that he had not been born that way...but that some illness or injury had taken the strength from him.

Some writings tell us that he was a stone mason...and that he came to Jesus for help because his livelihood was in his hands...and that he didn’t want to be a beggar. Now, if Jesus had been a scared man, he would have looked the other way, or perhaps he knew he was being watched. He knew that if he helped the man he was asking for trouble. Big trouble!

It was the Sabbath day...and all work was forbidden...and to heal was to work! What to do? The people wondered and murmured. The Pharisees watched intently, this was the test. “What is he going to do now?” Will he heal this man on the Sabbath? If he does, he will be in trouble with the law.”

As often was the case with Jesus, the real question was, “Which is the more important thing here...the law or the human being? So, Jesus turned to those gathered around and said, “What is the right thing to do—to take life, or save life?” Don’t miss the point here...Jesus knew that the Pharisees were plotting against his life and so he asks, “Is it right to take life or save life!” The onlookers said nothing. Then Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, “Stretch out your hand.” The man did...and he was healed.

Look at this now... He was healed. He was made well. He was made whole. He could work now. He could shake hands now. He could be productive now. He could have a new life now. There was great rejoicing in the synagogue? They all lived happily ever after? End of story? No! Not quite!

Listen to the last sentence...” The Pharisees went out and immediately and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” He did a great thing...and they didn’t rejoice. They sought to kill him...and don’t miss this now...they plodded with the Herodians...the Herodians! Who were they? They were the court entourage of Herod. This

shows how scared and desperate the Pharisees were. Normally they wouldn't have anything to do with the Herodians. Normally they considered them unclean...but now, they were so resentful of Jesus...so jealous...that they were prepared to enter into what was for them an unholy alliance. They plotted with the Herodians against Jesus...to kill him. That's how the story ends. Blinded by their hostility, they missed the holiness. Blinded by their hatred, they missed the healing. Blinded by their duty, they missed the divinity. Blinded by the old way, they missed the new way.

For you see, to the Pharisees, religion was ritual; it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. If you kept the rules, you were good. If you broke the rules, you were bad. Jesus broke their regulations and they were convinced that he was a trouble-maker and that he needed to be silenced to the good of the community.

On the other hand, to Jesus, religion meant service, caring, loving, helping people. Ritual was irrelevant unless it produced love in action. To Jesus, the most important thing in the world was not the correct performance of a ritual...but the spontaneous compassionate answer to the cry of human need. But we have to admit it. We most confess that often, even today, like the Pharisees, we are so blinded by the old that we miss the new.

That's what happened to the Pharisees that day. They were so alarmed and so upset when they saw Jesus break the Sabbath law...they were totally blinded to the compassionate and wonderfully loving thing that he had done. He had helped a man, healed a man, changed his life...and they didn't even see it. They were blinded by their rules. They were blinded by their laws. Blinded by the Law...they missed the love! The Lord was in that place and they didn't know it. The Pharisees were so trapped in their usual rigid ways of doing things that they were blind to the common sense of helping a man in need.

Remember the classic story about the young man who found his new wife in the kitchen preparing roast for dinner. Very carefully, she cut the roast in half. Then, very conscientiously, she put half in one pan and the other half in another pan and then put them in the oven.

Puzzled, her husband asked why she had cut the roast in half and put the halves in separate pans. "I've always done it that way," she answered. "But why?" persisted the husband. "Well, Mom did it that way." The husband picked up the phone and called her mother and asked her why she always cut the roast in half and baked them in two separate pans. She said, "Because Gramma did it that way." When they asked Gramma why she did that, she said it was because she didn't have a pan big enough to hold the roast.

Now this is a light illustration of a very significant point, namely, that we can get locked into certain ways of doing things, that we fail to consider whether they are right or wrong or whether they make sense.

That's what happened to the Pharisees. They had gotten so accustomed to doing things a certain way, that they were not open to any new way, even though it made sense. They couldn't understand the common sense of Jesus in helping this man because their common practice was not to help people on the Sabbath day. Blinded by the Law, we can miss the chance to love. In Mark 3, the Son of God walked into their lives and they tried to kill him. He tried to teach them love and they would not listen. They had their ways, they had their systems, and Jesus was upsetting their applecart. So, they plotted against him. Page after page in the scriptures, God urges us to put love first, to have good will toward all people, to pray for others, to help others, to care for others, to serve others...

God shows us that love is the answer, love is the way, love is what he wants...but we think our way will work better. We rely on power plays, hostile threats, political strategies, and bureaucratic systems.

We plot against each other. We flog one another with cruel words and deadly gossip. We crucify one another...trying to get our way. We don't quite trust love yet. We don't think it will work. Well, let me tell you something. He showed us it works...on a cross! There he showed us that love, not laws or practices, or systems, that love is the most powerful thing in the world. Try it for one day, it will change your life forever.