

## Trinity 17

September 26, 2021

Text: Luke 14:1-11

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The law is always good until it's not. We prefer the laws that help us, not ones that condemn us. We find ourselves utilizing laws that justify us rather than condemning us. We like laws that suit us more than those that encourage us, especially those to love one another.

The hosts of the sabbath dinner in the Gospel, the Pharisees, and the lawyers knew the laws of the Old Testament well. In fact, they were known for their meticulous devotions to the Law. They invited Jesus to attend and dine with them, but for what reason? Did they long desire to learn more about the kingdom of heaven, or did they have alternative motivations as they watched the Teacher with a close eye?

The man with dropsy would be an unwelcome guest to this meal. He was not welcome to dine among those of higher class, let alone enter into their presence with a disease that caused the swelling of flesh (and in the minds of some even death). But, out of necessity, this man with dropsy is driven to Jesus. Why? He heard a good report, *“that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.”* (Luke 7:22)

Yet, the watchful gaze of the Pharisees and lawyers did not depart from Jesus.

Jesus perceived their heart's intent and asked them, *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”* The question should be simple and straightforward for these wise men to answer, *“But they remained silent.”*

Why? Because they are hoping to weaponize the Law. If Jesus healed the man with dropsy on the sabbath, they would accuse Jesus and charge Him as a destroyer of the Law; but if He did not heal him, they would reproach Him as an ungracious, unmerciful man who refused to help such a poor, needy man, even though he could have.

But, Jesus isn't finished in asking questions of His hosts. He goes on to ask, *“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day? And they could not answer Him regarding these things.”*

They could not answer Jesus because He had put them to shame. The Pharisees and lawyers had interpreted the sabbath so narrowly that they would not tolerate Jesus helping the poor man with dropsy. At the same time, they would gather a village to rescue their donkey or ox from the pit.

It's not uncommon for us to also weaponize the law, whether in society, the church, or the Scriptures.

When you teach a child the Fourth Commandment, they will quickly ponder and ask, *“but in what ways does the commandment permit me not to listen to my parents’ directions?”* They want to know if there is a limit to the law and how far it extends into their lives. In other words, in what ways can I fight back or turn a deaf ear to my parents.

We are all like children within this world; we also desire to know if there are limits to the law and how far it extends into our lives.

I am thankful we have lawyers to ensure our laws are within the limits of the constitution of the United States of America. We need these men and women to study and answer the questions of our time. But, we also need to be cautious that we aren't simply looking for loopholes to fit our desires and our personal needs.

The conduct and day-to-day operations of a church are also often governed by a congregational constitution and bylaws. These documents are meant to bring order and, in their own way, peace among brothers and sisters. But, this also means members of a congregation must guard themselves against using earthly documents as weapons against one another in the conduct and life of the congregation.

Ultimately, the laws of this life all have their beginning in our Heavenly Father. The commands given to Moses reveal God’s Will for man. They lead us to our Savior, the only Son of the Father, Jesus Christ. Yet, by our trespasses, our sins, and failures to live according to God’s will – we must look to the cross where grace and forgiveness were won for all mankind.

We prayed in the collect today, *“Lord, we implore You, grant Your people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow You, the only God.”*

We are tempted to use the Law not as we ought but as we desire – to justify our works, our ways, and our words. We, too, can all reflect on times when we have watched others closely – eager to trap them in their transgression or simply to find a way to win a battle.

But today, in the presence of lawyers and Pharisees, Jesus healed the man with dropsy; He did it on the sabbath and now invites us as we prayed to follow Him.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13:10). Likewise: Owe no one anything, except to love one another.” (Romans 13:8) If I love my neighbor, then I help him, protect him, honor him, and do what I would want done to me.* (Martin Luther, AE 79, Page 179) Have we forgotten how to love one another?

Martin Luther writes, *“People say that the eye is very tender, but the conscience is still more tender and sensitive.”* (Martin Luther, AE 79, 155) A challenge for us is that man gravitates toward the law in a way that the conscience becomes entangled and unable to love man or God.

But, for you and those gathered in the home of the Pharisee, Jesus reminds us, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* (Mark 2:27)

In other words, the sabbath is for your restoration before your heavenly Father through confession and absolution. The sabbath is for pure hearts and minds to then proceed in reconciling and restoring one another.

This is the way of Jesus, it is the way of the cross, it is the way of humility.

Humility is not of external origins or for a show, but humility that is of the heart. Humility is born out of love and service between parent and child, brother and sister, friend and foe. A humility that leads one back to the cross, seeing that they deserve nothing but the lowest place among sinners, but rejoices as Christ invites you and says, *“Friend, move up higher.”*

*“Come to my feast, sit with me and receive my forgiveness.”* For today has been set aside for you, dear friends. Today is a day for you to receive mercy and forgiveness. Let us celebrate and let us go to the great Sabbath feast together - that we may depart with pure hearts and minds to follow the one true God. +INJ+

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

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