

Luke 13:13-17
August 22, '10

"THE LAW OF LOVE"

THERE IS A CLOSET – A RATHER LARGE CLOSET - IN THE HALLWAY BEHIND THE SANCTUARY THAT DENNIE, OUR SEXTON, REFERS TO AS “DENNIS’S CLOSET.”

ONE OF THE REASONS HE REFERS TO IT AS MY CLOSET IS BECAUSE THERE ARE TWO FOUR-DRAWER FILE CABINETS IN THAT CLOSET THAT ARE FILLED WITH MANILA FOLDERS, EACH OF WHICH CONTAINS THE MANUSCRIPT FOR A SERMON THAT I HAVE PREACHED ALONG WITH PAPERS & NOTES THAT I HAVE USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THAT SERMON.

THERE ARE ALSO NOTES WRITTEN ON THE FOLDER ITSELF – INCLUDING AN OUTLINE OF THE SERMON.

THERE ARE OCCASIONS – VERY RARE OCCASIONS – WHEN I BEGIN WRITING A SERMON WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A CLUE AS TO WHAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE & WHAT AN OUTLINE WOULD LOOK LIKE WERE I TO TRY TO PUT SOME SEMBLANCE OF ORDER TO IT.

TODAY IS SUCH AN OCCASION.

BEFORE I SAT DOWN TO COMPOSE IT, I HAD NO MORE OF A CLUE THAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW AS TO WHAT DIRECTION THIS SERMON WOULD TAKE.

AND, TO BE HONEST, WHEN I FINISH IT THIS MORNING YOU MAY *STILL* BE WONDERING WHAT DIRECTION IT *WENT*.

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST TO LABEL THIS A “STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS” SERMON.

WITH THAT AS AN INTRODUCTION, PERMIT ME TO ALLOW THAT STREAM TO FLOW.

SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, A NEWSPAPER REPORTER CALLED & ASKED IF SHE COULD TALK TO ME ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT HAD BEEN ON THE DOCKET OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF OUR DENOMINATION.

I TALKED TO HER AT LENGTH ABOUT SOME OF WHAT I THOUGHT WERE VERY IMPORTANT & CRITICAL ISSUES.

SHE WAS DETERMINED, THOUGH, TO FOCUS ON JUST ONE – A “HOT BUTTON” ISSUE & EVEN THOUGH LESS THAN 10% OF OUR CONVERSATION WAS SPENT ON THAT ISSUE, *THAT* WAS THE ONLY ONE INCLUDED IN THE ARTICLE.

I MADE BRIEF MENTION OF IT THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY IN WORSHIP & INVITED ANYONE TO LET ME KNOW IF THEY WANTED TO TALK ABOUT IT.

I RECEIVED ONE SUCH REQUEST & FROM THAT I CONCLUDED THAT “HOT BUTTON” ITEMS AREN’T ALL THAT IMPORTANT TO US HERE AT EASTMINSTER.

I THINK MOST OF US KNOW THAT WE ARE A VERY DIVERSE CONGREGATION WHEN IT COMES TO SOME OF THOSE ISSUES.

THERE ARE SOME IN THIS CHURCH FAMILY WHO FEEL VERY STRONGLY ON ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE & SOME WHO FEEL VERY STRONGLY ON THE OTHER SIDE & PERHAPS THE VAST MAJORITY ARE SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE.

I'VE ALWAYS LIKED TO BELIEVE THAT THE REASON FOR SUCH DIVERSITY HERE IS THAT THOSE OF YOU WHO HOLD AN EXTREME POSITION ABOUT SOMETHING ARE WISE ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT YOU COULD BE WRONG & YOU HAVE ENOUGH TRUST IN YOUR BROTHERS & SISTERS IN CHRIST OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY TO LISTEN TO & LEARN FROM THEM.

ALL OF THAT, THOUGH, LED ME RECENTLY TO WONDER ABOUT THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY – MY OWN & THAT OF THIS CONGREGATION.

“WHO AM I?”

“WHO ARE WE?”

YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING – “A PERSON WHO DOESN'T STAND FOR SOMETHING WILL FALL FOR ANYTHING.”

WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO US?

THAT LED ME DOWN THE PREACHING PATH THAT I HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING SINCE THE APPEARANCE OF THAT NEWSPAPER ARTICLE SOME SIX WEEKS AGO.

WE SPENT THREE WEEKS ON A SINGLE PASSAGE – A PASSAGE ON PRAYER.

THE DISCOVERY OF WHO YOU ARE MUST BE ROOTED IN PRAYER.

LISTENING TO & SPEAKING TO GOD IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHO WE ARE CALLED TO BE & WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO.

WE CONNECTED THAT ROOTEDNESS IN PRAYER TO THE IDEA OF “SECULAR THEOLOGY” – TRANSFORMING SOMETHING SACRED INTO EVERYDAY LIFE.

HOW DO WE TAKE THE LESSONS LEARNED IN THE SACREDNESS OF PRAYER & MAKE THOSE LESSONS COME ALIVE IN OUR EVERYDAY EXISTENCE?

LAST WEEK WE CONSIDERED THE WAY IN WHICH CHRIST LONGS TO IGNITE THE BURNING PASSION INSIDE YOUR SOUL.

AS WE LOOK AT THE LECTIONARY GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY, WE FIND A PASSAGE THAT BUILDS ON ALL OF THAT.

IT'S A PASSAGE THAT RECORDS AN EVENT THAT IS ONLY FOUND IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

THIS IS THE THIRD & FINAL INCIDENT LUKE RECORDS OF A HEALING JESUS PERFORMED ON THE SABBATH.

IT IS ALSO THE FINAL TIME IN LUKE THAT WE WILL FIND JESUS IN A SYNAGOGUE.

THERE ARE TWO THINGS THAT TAKE PLACE HERE.

THERE'S THE HEALING & THERE'S THE CONTROVERSY WHICH FOLLOWS.

THE HEALING INVOLVES AN UNNAMED WOMAN – A WOMAN “BENT OVER,” RESTRICTED, NEARLY PARALYZED.

SHE'S OBVIOUSLY IN PAIN & AGONY & HAS BEEN THIS WAY FOR 18 YEARS.

HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN SOMEONE LIKE THAT – SOMEONE WHO, LITERALLY OR FIGURATIVELY, HAS BEEN “BENT OVER” – SOMEONE WHO, BECAUSE OF LIFE’S CIRCUMSTANCES HAS BEEN RESTRICTED – SOMEONE WHO’S BEEN VIRTUALLY PARALYZED BY THEIR LOT IN LIFE – SOMEONE WHO’S BEEN IN PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL OR EMOTIONAL PAIN FOR YEARS?

MAYBE YOU *KNOW* THIS UNNAMED WOMAN – AND MAYBE YOU *ARE* THIS UNNAMED WOMAN.

IT DOESN’T MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE & IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT GENDER YOU ARE.

IF YOU’VE *BEEN* THERE OR IF YOU’RE THERE *RIGHT* NOW, YOU UNDERSTAND THIS WOMAN’S CONDITION.

BUT NOTICE THAT SHE DIDN’T COME TO THE SYNAGOGUE THAT DAY FOR HEALING.

SHE WAS JUST THERE AS PART OF THE WORSHIPING CONGREGATION.

SHE DIDN’T FIGHT HER WAY THROUGH THE CROWD TO GET TO JESUS, CRYING OUT FOR HELP.

IT WAS JESUS WHO WENT TO *HER*.

IT WAS JESUS WHO CALLED TO HER & TOUCHED HER & SET HER FREE.

I’VE GOT GOOD NEWS FOR YOU THIS MORNING.

JESUS IS IN THIS WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY TODAY & AGAIN HE CALLS THOSE WHO ARE “BENT OVER,” THOSE WHO ARE RESTRICTED, THOSE WHO ARE NEARLY PARALYZED BY LIFE.

HE NOT ONLY CALLS YOU, BUT HE WILL TOUCH YOU & SET YOU FREE FROM WHATEVER IT IS THAT IMPRISONS YOU & HOLDS YOU IN BONDAGE.

I THINK THERE’S SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT & INSTRUCTIVE ABOUT THE WAY THIS HEALING COMES ABOUT.

AS I SAID, THE WOMAN ISN’T THE ONE INITIATES THE CONTACT WITH JESUS.

HE’S THE ONE WHO DOES IT.

HERE HE IS, IN THE MIDST OF DOING WHAT HE DOES – HE’S PREACHING IN THE SYNAGOGUE – AND, IN THE COURSE OF “*DOING HIS JOB*” SO TO SPEAK – HE SEES SOMEONE IN NEED & STOPS WHAT HE’S DOING TO MEET THAT NEED.

DID ANYONE ELSE EVEN NOTICE HER?

DID ANYONE ELSE EVEN THINK ABOUT HER?

DID ANYONE ELSE CARE ABOUT HER?

I WONDER – WOULD I HAVE NOTICED HER?

WOULD YOU?

AS YOU GO ABOUT YOUR DAILY LIFE - IN THE COURSE OF “*DOING YOUR JOB*”- HOW MANY “BENT OVER” PEOPLE – HOW MANY RESTRICTED & NEARLY PARALYZED MEN & WOMEN DO YOU PASS BY EVERY DAY?

WHO IS IN PAIN & AGONY THAT YOU NEVER EVEN NOTICE?

HERE’S “*SECULAR THEOLOGY*” – THE SACREDNESS OF GOD’S CLAIM UPON YOUR SOUL BEING TRANSFORMED INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER INVITES YOU TO OPEN YOUR EYES TO YOUR “BENT OVER” BROTHERS & SISTERS THAT YOU PASS EVERY DAY.

THIS IS THE FIRE THAT CHRIST LONGS TO KINDLE WITHIN YOU – THE BURNING PASSION TO LOVE AS HE LOVED.

THIS PASSAGE IS NOT ONLY ABOUT A HEALING, THOUGH.

IT’S ABOUT THE ENSUING CONTROVERSY BROUGHT ABOUT BY THAT HEALING.

I HAVE TO TELL YOU IN ALL HONESTY, IF I WERE PICKING A ROLE FOR MYSELF IN THIS PASSAGE, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE THAT OF THE SYNAGOGUE LEADER.

HE IS – AS LUKE SAYS – “INDIGNANT” THAT JESUS HAS HEALED THIS WOMAN ON THE SABBATH.

I HAVE DIFFICULTY *NOT* AGREEING WITH HIM.

SOME OF YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT THE SABBATH.

I HAVE SAID, MORE THAN ONCE, THAT I BELIEVE MORE PROBLEMS IN OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES & IN SOCIETY IN GENERAL CAN BE TRACED TO OUR VIOLATION OF THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT THAN TO ANY OTHER SOURCE.

I BELIEVE GOD GAVE US THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT FOR A REASON.

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH IN THE TIME OF JESUS WAS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE.

EVEN TODAY, ESPECIALLY WITHIN ORTHODOX JUDAISM, IT IS CRUCIAL TO ONE’S FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

I RECENTLY READ ABOUT A TOUR GROUP IN JERUSALEM WHOSE BUS PULLED INTO A HOTEL JUST AFTER SUNDOWN ON THE SABBATH RIGHT ON THE EDGE OF A JEWISH ORTHODOX DISTRICT.

THE BUS WAS IMMEDIATELY SURROUNDED BY MEN WHO WERE FURIOUS.

THEY BARGED INTO THE HOTEL & CONFRONTED THE BUS DRIVER.

THE LEADER OF THE GROUP SAID, “*IF YOU EVER COME BACK HERE AGAIN, WE WILL TURN YOUR BUS OVER & BURN IT!*”

THE IMPORTANCE OF SABBATH OBSERVANCE IS CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING WHY THIS SYNAGOGUE LEADER IS SO INDIGNANT WHEN JESUS VIOLATES THE LAW IN HEALING THIS UNNAMED WOMAN.

AND, DARE I SAY, THE ARGUMENT JESUS USES TO JUSTIFY WHAT HE’S DONE IS WEAK AT BEST!

THE QUESTION I WOULD ASK IS THE SAME ONE THE SYNAGOGUE LEADER ASKS – WHY DOES THE HEALING HAVE TO TAKE PLACE TODAY?

WHY NOT WAIT JUST A FEW HOURS & DO IT TOMORROW?

AFTER ALL, THIS WOMAN HAS BEEN BENT OVER FOR 18 YEARS – WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL A FEW MORE HOURS MAKE?!

THE ARGUMENT JESUS USES JUST ISN’T VERY CONVINCING.

WATERING YOUR ANIMALS IS NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL.

BUT THIS WOMAN WASN’T GOING TO DIE IF JESUS HAD JUST WAITED UNTIL THE NEXT DAY TO HEAL HER.

IT'S ALMOST AS IF HE IS INTENTIONALLY DOING SOMETHING TO DISTURB THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

REMEMBER LAST WEEK WHEN JESUS SAID HE HAD COME TO BRING DIVISION?

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE IN REAL LIFE OF THE DIVISION HE CAME TO BRING.

IT'S REALLY A SIMPLE MATTER OF "SABBATH RULES" ON THE ONE SIDE AND "WHO RULES THE SABBATH" ON THE OTHER.

JESUS WANTED TO OFFEND THE SYNAGOGUE LEADER.

HE WANTED HIS ACTION TO CREATE CONFLICT.

HE WANTED TO CONFRONT THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS & BRING THIS ISSUE OUT IN THE OPEN.

NOW DON'T MISUNDERSTAND.

THE LAW WAS IMPORTANT TO JESUS.

LATER IN LUKE, JESUS SAYS, "IT IS EASIER FOR HEAVEN & EARTH TO PASS AWAY THAN FOR ONE STROKE IN A LETTER IN THE LAW TO BE DROPPED."

JESUS UPHELD BIBLICAL LAW.

HIS CONFLICTS WERE OVER HOW TO INTERPRET IT.

TO THE LEADER OF THE SYNAGOGUE, KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS WAS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE.

EVERYTHING ELSE WAS SECONDARY.

BUT FOR JESUS, IT WAS THE LAW OF LOVE THAT WAS OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE.

I THINK JESUS INTENTIONALLY CREATED THIS DIVISION, THIS CONFLICT, THIS CONTROVERSY IN AN EFFORT TO TELL PEOPLE THEY NEEDED TO GET THEIR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT.

COMMANDMENTS, RULES, REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, TRADITIONS & LAWS ARE ALWAYS SUBORDINATE TO THE LAW OF LOVE.

MAYBE ALL OF THIS BRINGS US TO BACK TO A QUESTION I ASKED EARLIER.

"WHO ARE YOU?"

"WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?"

COLLECTIVELY – AS A CONGREGATION – "WHO ARE WE?" & "WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?"

THIS PAST WEEK I HAD A RATHER HUMBLING EXPERIENCE.

ONE OF OUR CARS SPENT THE WEEK WITH A MECHANIC AS IT WAS BEING REPAIRED & I DROVE THE CHURCH VAN FOR A FEW DAYS.

I DISCOVERED SOMETHING THAT I'M SURE SOME OF OUR CHURCH VAN DRIVERS HAVE DISCOVERED.

I FOUND OUT THAT DRIVING A VEHICLE WITH OUR CHURCH NAME SPREAD ACROSS ITS SIDE, MADE ME A BETTER DRIVER.

I ALWAYS WORE MY SEAT BELT, I NEVER EXCEEDED THE SPEED LIMIT, I ALWAYS USED MY TURN SIGNALS & I NEVER, EVER EXPRESSED EXASPERATION AT THE DRIVING HABITS OF OTHERS.

NOW, LET ME HASTEN TO ADD THAT I ALWAYS OBSERVE SOME OF THOSE THINGS ANYWAY – BUT, I MUST ADMIT, THERE ARE OTHERS THAT, OCCASIONALLY, I FUDGE ON – JUST A LITTLE.

BUT THERE WAS ALSO SOMETHING ELSE I NOTICED IN DRIVING THE CHURCH VAN.

I ALWAYS WENT OUT OF MY WAY TO DO THE COURTEOUS THING – NOT JUST THE *NORMAL* COURTEOUS THING, BUT THE *UNEXPECTED* COURTEOUS THING.

DRIVING THAT VAN MADE ME AN OBVIOUS REPRESENTATIVE OF THIS CONGREGATION & I WANTED OTHERS TO SEE SOMEONE FROM EASTMINSTER ACTING IN A KIND & LOVING WAY.

IN THIS INCIDENT I THINK JESUS IS TELLING US SOMETHING SIMILAR.

YES, WE'RE CALLED TO OBEY THE LAW.

BUT WE'RE ALSO CALLED TO SOMETHING MORE – SOMETHING BIGGER – SOMETHING BETTER.

WE'RE CALLED TO GO BEYOND THE LAW OF THE LAND & EXTEND THE LAW OF LOVE.

WE'RE CALLED TO – EVERY DAY – LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO DO SOMETHING UNEXPECTED.

WE'RE CALLED TO RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO ARE “BENT OVER,” THOSE WHO ARE RESTRICTED, THOSE WHO ARE IN BONDAGE.

WE'RE CALLED TO SEE THEIR PAIN & DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO RELIEVE IT.

I BELIEVE THAT'S WHO YOU ARE AS AN INDIVIDUAL SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST & I BELIEVE THAT'S WHO WE ARE AS A CHURCH FAMILY.

THAT'S THE FIRE THAT JESUS LONGS TO KINDLE INSIDE OF YOU & INSIDE OF US.

HE WANTS TO IGNITE, WITHIN US, A BURNING PASSION FOR HIS LAW OF LOVE.

THAT IS, I BELIEVE, THE MINISTRY TO WHICH HE HAS CALLED US.

HE WANTS IT TO BECOME OUR LIFESTYLE – A LIFESTYLE OF COMPASSION.

LIFESTYLE COMPASSION MINISTRY.

THAT HAS A NICE RING, DOESN'T IT?

I'VE GOT MORE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU.

NEXT WEEK, WE'LL HEAR FROM SOMEONE WHO WROTE A WHOLE BOOK ABOUT IT. AMEN.

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