

Mark 2: 23-28.

23 One sabbath Jesus and his disciples were going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' ²⁵And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' ²⁷Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Commentary: Jesus is really pushing all the right buttons. He has the Pharisees especially perturbed with his apparent disregard for existing Sabbath laws. And observing the Sabbath properly was especially sacred to the Pharisees. It's not that Jesus doesn't care about the Sabbath. After all, he does say elsewhere in the gospels that he came not to abolish but to fulfill the law. Rather, he is criticizing the Pharisees for failing to observe its real essence. The Sabbath was given by God as a means of serving the needs of the human spirit, not chaining it by rules and customs which serve to fortify the power of the religious by imposing bad guilt and fear of eternal punishment. Jesus wants to foster an obedience to God and an observance to the law from the heart, out of love.

Now typically, we would easily disregard the Pharisees and their rules (to be "pharisaical" is to be a stickler for rules). But in this season of Covid-19, we are embracing the need for stricter and stricter rules and we are easily perturbed at those who are "breaking the sabbath" so to speak because it affects the well being of us all (God will not bless us or liberate us if we don't deal with the weakest chain in the link the Pharisees would argue). But it is also precisely at times like this where our humanity and compassion can become casualties. In our fear and stress we can become more easily resentful, judgemental, intolerant, even hateful. Racial incidents, hoarding, public blaming and shaming... it's all ramping up, and even as some situations are warranting strong denunciations of behaviour, there are many incidents where people are falsely accused before all the facts and circumstances are fully known, especially in a social media dominated time.

So, Jesus plea is: let us not lose the quality of our humanity and the compassion that must define us at our best as we journey through this time of increasing restrictions.

Questions: Do you do some things for the wrong reasons? Do you need to become more transparent and sincere in your motives and intentions? Do you need to step back, name your fear and stress and pray for greater compassion?

Prayer: Lord God, teach me to obey because I want to and because obedience to your will is my good. Give me the courage to let go things I do for the wrong reasons, because I feel guilty or because I am afraid or because I am stressed and need to externalize it somehow. Give me the space and heart to accept your unconditional acceptance of me in all my imperfection; Amen.