

Proper 16C, St John's Olney, 25 August 2019
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

S.D.G.

When I was in grade school the threat that had the most impact on behavior was "this is going on your permanent record". My school aged self had this vision of my "permanent record" as being far more permanent than it was. I envisioned that when applying for college the admissions staff would soon learn of my 4th grade mis-deeds. What I did not realize at the time is that far more impactful than my "permanent record" was the informal labeling that teachers shared. The 4th grade teachers told the 5th grade teachers who the trouble makers were, and the 4th grade teachers had learned that from the 3rd grade teachers. Your reputation was far more permanent than your "permanent record".

And just so there is no digging into my past let me share that I was actually well behaved in 4th grade, 3rd grade maybe not so much, but I loved Mrs. Wilson, my 4th grade teacher, and her husband was an ordained minister. My being here today, as ordained clergy, was affected by Dr. and Mrs. Wilson.

We have it in the permanent record, our Scriptures, that Jesus was a trouble maker. He overturned the tables of the money changers, he talked smack to Pontius Pilot, he picked grain on the Sabbath, and he healed on the Sabbath. And most famously He claimed to be the Son of God. His permanent record clearly shows him to be a trouble maker. And the temple officials all knew to watch out for him; they knew he flaunted the Sabbath rules. The temple officials were intent on assuring that all the rules, especially the Sabbath rules, were kept to the strictest standard. In many cases, the rules became more important than the intent of what those rules were designed to protect.

Growing up many of us remember the blue laws that kept stores and businesses closed on Sunday. There were no movie theaters or restaurants open on Sunday afternoon. In the strictest of communities the children did not even play sand-lot baseball on Sunday. Rules intent on honoring the Sabbath, the third commandment, disappeared as stores opened and Sunday began to look just like Saturday. The focus

has been on the rules that surround the Sabbath, and I wonder if the rules made us lose sight of the real intent. What is the true intent of the Sabbath tradition? So hold that thought.

A few years ago I had a very detailed dream that I was a Jew in Germany trying to escape Hitler's regime. I shared my story with Rabbi Jack Moline, who you met when he preached here, and he remarked that this was not the first escaping-from-Nazis dream he had heard but it was the first coming from an Episcopal priest.

In my dream the opportunity came to escape on a moon-less night, but this night was the Sabbath. Could such a journey be made on the Sabbath? To complicate matter I was going to be traveling by bicycle and could I ride a bike on the Sabbath, or could I push the bike so I would have it when the Sabbath had passed?

Rabbi Jack responded that *the principle of "saving a life supersedes shabbat". It is the Jewish legal principle that permits doctors, first responders and ordinary Jews who come upon dangers to others to intervene in emergency circumstances. The Biblical principle from Deuteronomy is "you shall live by them (the commandments)," and this was understood by the first rabbis to include "and not die because of them."*

So if the opportunity to save yourself or others presented itself on a moonless Friday night, Rabbi Jack says the proper Jewish response would be "hop on the bike and ride like you stole it."

If it were not a life-saving situation the rules of shabbat come into play and you would not depart until after sun down Saturday. You would not ride, carry, or push the bike during shabbat, nor would you repair a flat tire. But as Rabbi Jack said *"Saving a life supersedes shabbat" it is a principle any Jew, especially a "professional" Jew, would have known in the time of Jesus.*

The leader of the synagogue clearly did not feel this was a life saving situation that would have permitted ignoring the rules of shabbat. Jesus pointed out that even during the Sabbath it was expected that live stock would be untied so as to be fed and watered; freedom and life sustaining food was to be given. Twice Jesus suggests that this daughter of Abraham is being set free from bondage. Freedom and life sustaining food is a reference to the Exodus, the escape out of bondage in Egypt.

So perhaps we need to look at whether the Sabbath is built on restrictions or built on freedom. What is the intent of the Sabbath tradition?

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. The third commandment comes from a reading of the opening chapters of Genesis.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:1-3)

God blessed time and then God rested. The Sabbath is a time for us to rest with God. It is a time for us to be free from the busyness, even the busyness of the biblical era, and rest with God. The rules of the Sabbath assured that even slaves and aliens in the land were to be freed from busyness and be able to rest.

The commandment to honor the Sabbath is not about restrictions, it is about life giving rest. The Sabbath is about resting with God. The Sabbath is about abiding with God.

Giving rest to those who are weary or oppressed. Giving rest to those who are persecuted or fleeing violence. Are we not all sons and daughters of Abraham? Are we not all to share in life giving rest?

Currently there are events marking the 400th anniversary of the arrival in the colony of Virginia of a ship with a cargo of more than 20 enslaved Africans. As important as this event is, 1619 no more marks the beginning of slavery in America than does the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 mark the end of slavery in America. Our brothers and sisters of color, sons and daughters of Abraham, still face a bondage that calls for healing so that they can truly be set free, so that they can experience life giving rest.

Sabbath rules apply to resident, slave, and stranger alike. Those from other lands were part of the Sabbath observance, they were to be offered life giving rest. Our brothers and sisters from other lands, all sons and daughters of Abraham, come to us seeking freedom, freedom from violence and oppression, and instead are greeted with

imprisonment. Many travel hundreds, even thousands of miles, on foot. They seek to be freed from violence and oppression and they seek life giving rest.

Our LGBTQ brothers and sisters are all created in the image of God, just as you and I are created in the image of God, they are sons and daughters of Abraham. Discrimination and violent attacks are an unwarranted part of their lives; they too are deserving of the life giving rest that Jesus shares.

If the sabbath is about life giving rest, resting with God, did Jesus' actions make it clear that this priority was for the Sabbath, and for every other day of the week? What is the impact if Jesus also made it clear that rules and regulations were not to inhibit this life giving rest? What if Jesus is telling us that the life giving rest of the Sabbath is to be experienced by all, and until everyone is freed from the bondage of hatred, discrimination, oppression, or violence this life giving rest can not be fully experienced?

Jesus freed the unnamed woman from her bondage so that she, and everyone else, could experience the life giving rest of the Sabbath. Jesus broke the rules of the Sabbath to free the unnamed women. How do we do that in our own lives? How do we assure that blessing others with freedom and life giving rest takes precedence over any rule?

Some say that history is written by the victor but that view negates the importance of our own actions, the importance of the stand that we take. We shape whether history will view our permanent record as reflecting exclusion or inclusion. We shape whether our permanent record will reflect adhering to rules or breaking rules, and it will reflect whether our actions were to the benefit, or detriment, of our sisters and brothers.

Jesus was a trouble maker – and for all the right reasons. Jesus did what built up community, Jesus did what honored the dignity of every human being, Jesus did what honored and praised God. Being a trouble maker is not all that bad.

Amen,