

Lord of the Sabbath...and Everything else

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[0 : 00] It is wonderful to be here again, here with you again for another confirmation. Fruits of the Ministry here in the parish at Holy Trinity Doncaster and also at St John's Blackburn.

Caleb, James and Joy are publicly saying yes. Yes to Jesus' call to follow him on their journey through life.

He's saying yes, I want to belong to the church. I want to stand up for what I believe. And for James, you said though yes yourself in baptism.

Now you're saying it in a sense with me representing the wider church. And Caleb and Joy, as Steph explained, you're saying yes to the promises made on your behalf at your baptism.

So you're really confirming those promises. And really it's an opportunity to publicly take responsibility for your faith. More than happy to put my thing on, I just didn't want to do feedback, that's all.

[1 : 10] You want me to put it on? No, no? Great. Okay. Because we're Christ's ambassadors. God's co-workers in the world.

As we continue in your series on the Gospel of Mark, who is this man? How do these two incidences which we've heard tonight, both involving the Sabbath, the seventh day, a day of rest, one in terms of what the disciples and Jesus were eating, the other in terms of Jesus healing the man with a shriveled hand, how do they speak into the promises being made today?

I turn to Christ. I repent of my sins. Turn away from them. Turn away from selfish living, all that is false and unjust.

I renounce Satan and all evil. And promising by God's grace that you will strive to live your whole life as a disciple of Christ, loving God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus' summary of the commandments. Keeping the Sabbath was, of course, one of the ten commandments.

[2 : 39] Ten commandments, ten words for life, given to the people of Israel when they had escaped, been led from slavery, God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land.

But before, they're gathered at Mount Sinai and they receive these words of life, the ten commandments. And it had been reinforced by the prophets and by subsequent Jewish teaching. It was one of the things, keeping the Sabbath, the day of rest, that marked out Jewish people over the centuries from their pagan neighbours.

One of the things that reminded Jewish people they are God's people. The gift of the Sabbath at its heart is knowing when to stop.

Actually, that's precisely what the word Sabbath means. Knowing when to stop. Christians, over time, change the day of rest from the seventh day to the first day of the week.

[3 : 57] In keeping, interestingly enough, the New Testament doesn't actually officially change the day, but it's in keeping with what we read in the New Testament of Christians gathering to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

I'm actually old enough to remember when shops being closed on a Sunday. You couldn't buy a thing. No sport. All of that. You just really were pretty quiet at home because there wasn't anything else to do.

And even now, even though if we're honest, it's not always obvious now in our 24-7 culture how best or most appropriately to achieve it, we do tend to think that one day from work in a week is a healthy ideal.

So even if you know you're working a five-day week, there's all the stuff you might need to do in the house or whatever, there really is a sense of it's good to stop in that rhythm. So let's not lose sight

of the fact that the Sabbath is a unique and precious gift, in a sense, from Israel to humankind, from God through Israel to humankind.

The word has actually remained untranslated in languages around the world. There might be exceptions to that, but a lot of languages just use the word Sabbath.

[5 : 28] It's not an odd moral commandment which people observed to earn merit or favour with God. It was a sign that they belonged to the true God, the creator of the world, God himself who rested on the seventh day.

It was a reminder to God's people, you have been liberated from Egypt. Don't let yourselves become slaves again.

Be very careful not to land into new slaveries, such as slavery, to work. Know when to stop. Celebrate your freedom and let all your fellow creatures share in it. Well, Jesus and his followers enjoy it.

One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain fields and as his disciples walked along, they begin to pick some heads of grain. These are the disciples, remember, from last week, I'm assuming you were there last week, who don't fast because the bridegroom's here.

[6 : 44] They're not slaves of work, no, but nor are they slaves of the sort of very pedantic or joyless sanctification of the Sabbath. They pluck the harvest ears of corn and sample the good creation and they actually walk further than what was prescribed on the Sabbath, no doubt, to actually do it.

As the Archbishop has reminded us in his last two synod charges, keeping our confidence in God's purposes can be difficult in the anxious age we live in and often at the root of that anxiety is fear.

Verse 24, the Pharisees said to him, look, why are you doing, why are they doing that which is, what is unlawful on the Sabbath?

When we think Pharisee, we can tend to think hypocrite. Someone, you know, who makes out to be very pious, very godly, but isn't, the name Pharisee, Pharisee means those set apart.

It actually was rarely used to denote a fixed group. They actually belonged to a spiritual current which from the second century before Christ strove for strict observance of the law.

[8 : 18] They were often wise and courageous men who had to fight to preserve their tradition at the risk of their lives.

Because they were, you know, under Roman rule and others before that. They cherished and preserved what was distinctly Jewish and it's above all because their dedication and perseverance that this precious heritage of the Sabbath didn't disappear into the powerful Greco-Roman culture of those days.

The difficulty was when their anxiety to keep to the heart of their faith, their fear that it would be lost led them to becoming the self-appointed guardians of public morality through strict observance of the law in a way that all the things in the way they broke that down a long way from ten words for life and all the detail that you can read because there's not just what you read in the scriptures, there's also the Mishnah, losing sight of God's purposes of life, restoration, redemption.

So Jesus and his disciples in doing what they were doing, well for some Pharisees, says the Pharisees because of that stereotype, but really we should read more for some Pharisees, it means they were nibbling away, he cornyer nibble, they were nibbling away at the holy faith of the fathers. So like a good rabbi, good rabbi that he is, Jesus answers a question with a question. Verse 25, have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need?

[10 : 32] We read it tonight. Thank you. In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread which is lawful only for priests to eat.

And I can tell you that, you know, even in our tradition we let everyone eat the bread, in our faith I mean, we let everyone eat the bread, but as a normal practice once communion is finished, we want to treat that bread as consecrated and we want to treat it reverently.

And he also gave some to his companions. So what's going on here? Who is this man? Is Jesus putting himself on a par with King David?

So yes, we're out of line with what it means to traditionally, normally observe the Sabbath. But this is a really special circumstance and there's actually precedence because what we heard read was the period when David has been already anointed by Saul, sorry, by Samuel, been anointed by Samuel but not yet enthroned because Saul is still king and so David's actually on the run gathering support, waiting for his time to come.

So it's a deliberate sign like the refusal to fast that the king is here. Who is this man?

[12 : 16] In the context of the gospel as a whole since Mark is associating David's opposition to the violent Saul and he was violent if you read 1 Samuel with Jesus' opposition to a religion in which the message of love can come off worst and actually will come off worst often in the face of dogmatism and slavery to the letter of the law because it can so easily lead to people being excluded, treating people as other because you're so determined to be right in which people can be sacrificed for principles.

then he said to them verse 27 the sabbath was made for man and women not man for the sabbath. Jesus' opposition to the letter of the law killing the spirit of the law this critical voice was not new. There were older rabbinic traditions which spoke of the sabbath is given to you but you have not been handed over to it.

Or to put it in terms of one of the promises you are confirming today commandments are good as long as they serve God and neighbour.

If they don't do that nothing against transgressing them. So the son of man is lord even of the sabbath verse 28 it's the second time you'll have heard Jesus referring to himself as the son of man in Mark who is this man the son of man capital s capital m what's happening here in Mark seems to evoke the messianic figure of Daniel chapter seven whose arrival and enthronement signals the start of God's kingdom so the son of man isn't just any human being but the Messiah a claim that in Jesus the new day is dawning the king is here and it's a claim that takes us to the key promise you are confirming today that we're hearing being confirmed today that is

[15 : 05] I turn to Jesus the Messiah see Christ is not Jesus last name I'm sure you know it actually is the Greek word for Messiah the true representative human being the one promised by God to restore his people who came not to repress human beings but restore them to full humanity well Mark now has another story about Jesus and the Sabbath another story that which takes us deeper into what it means to strive to live as a disciple of Christ loving God and our neighbour as ourselves it takes place in a synagogue and it begs the question how might we beware that our striving to live as a disciple of Christ how might we beware that becoming shaped by anxiety and fear and all that leads to or driven by anxiety and fear that we won't somehow be good enough that we need to make sure everyone is good enough the opposite of freedom in

Christ we see it so easily with the Pharisees let's not be blind to where our fears and anxieties can lead us another time Jesus went into the synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath this hand was paralysed the man can't pluck ears of corn to mention just one thing he has no part in that sense of enjoying the good creation out in the fields in the beginning God saw that everything God had created was good indeed very good well Jesus is saying that this hand is not good Jesus said to the man with a shriveled hand stand up in front of everyone so he makes that man the centre of attention attention this man just like everybody else in that synagogue has his very own place in

God's heart and Jesus is drawing everyone's attention to him he's included in that sense he's being asked to stand up just like I'll be asking you guys later to stand up then Jesus asked them which is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil to save life or to kill but they remained silent doing something good on the Sabbath day of rest is not an issue for Jesus for him the Sabbath is the day for being close to people who are suffering and if possible healing them and I think we want to be very conscious that a faith the religion that goes with that which has lost its healing power is as withered as the hand we're reading of in this particular incident in

Mark and it can be a religion that makes people sick if you neglect the good if you neglect to love in other words you become selfish you become the opposite of what is true false and you can become part of injustices and so you end up doing evil it's not forbidden to save a person on the Sabbath if it's not forbidden to save a person on the Sabbath then surely it's not permissible to let a person perish Jesus looks his challenges straight in the face and they are silent he looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts is there nothing that can melt their frozen feelings we're often we're not told a lot about people's emotions in the

Gospels that much really so it's quite significant here Jesus is looking at them in anger and he is also deeply distressed at the same time he's deeply distressed he really wants to for them to see it to change have their hearts melted by the grace of God what's going to help them see it well he says to the man stretch out your hand he stretched out it out and his hand was completely restored

has Jesus now violated the Sabbath no he saved a man because think of what that healing meant for him particularly in that time in that place they didn't have all the medical things that we have think of what it meant the social security think of what he could now do and be a part of [21 : 29] Jesus thought it was good but there are Pharisees who see things differently and if things go on like this they may as well pack up and go home they will have lost their particular role that they had put themselves in to be the self appointed guardians of public morality wouldn't it be far better off if this healer this blasphemous healer was got rid of then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus this is very ironic the Herodians were the natural enemies of the Pharisees because they supported they're called Herodians because they supported Herod Antipas whom

Pharisees normally regarded as a dangerous traitor to Judaism because Herod Antipas was a puppet ruler of the Romans so why did they do that join forces with the Herodians look to them well it comes back to what I was saying at the beginning you know you read the Pharisees and that's because quite rightly of the sort of things I've been talking about but we do need to remember that while there were Pharisees there really was no such thing as the Pharisee in terms of a defined group quite like that Mark uses that term and we use that term because in the conflict with Jesus and later with his followers Pharisees were above all as I said the model of the type of believer who seek their salvation rigidly and anxiously whether that's in the observance of certain rituals or dogmatically preserving a system of understanding of faith and if necessary seeing it as okay to put that before people helpful to keep it in mind as you keep on going through

Mark so Pharisees had no power themselves if they were going to attack Jesus they needed to make unlikely unholy alliances and in this season of Lent as we moved as we are preparing to celebrate Jesus death and resurrection two weeks away it is keep in mind Jesus is still only here in Galilee at this point hasn't moved far Capernaum he's not even begun his final journey to Jerusalem but even here in Galilee we are seeing Jesus already attracting opposition and we see him stand up for what he believes what it means for him to show love to this man with the shriveled hand joy James and Caleb today we will be praying for the strengthening of the Holy Spirit that's the specific prayer for today the strengthening of the Holy Spirit and the gifting of the Holy Spirit we look forward to how Jesus will be working through you in the future and there will be many good things I'm sure many times of joy and we look forward to that I do want to say to you that we are also praying in effect that you will have the courage and the strength of Jesus to stand up when needed it can take incredible courage at times to stand up and show love to people to include people when at times it's difficult and to know when to show grace when to actually say what's important here it's not easy at times so we'll be praying very specifically for things like the gift of wisdom and perseverance listen all for the different gifts that we are praying for

I pray that God will be opening your eyes to see God's healing and restorative work breaking through in Jesus it did then and it does now and that as you live out the promises you are confirming today the promises made at your baptism you will be part and parcel of that as you follow Jesus that God's love in the power of the spirit will work through you so that others will know who is this man that he is the Messiah the one promised by God and it's in him that we find what it is to be truly human and all that means that God will be working through you so that others are saved restored to life what it means to be fully human one of God's people and they