

## Luke 13:19-17      A Sabbath Healing

In the gospels, the religious leaders are suspicious of the healing power of Jesus. In Mark chapter 2, for instance, one can read about a paralyzed man whose friends lowered him through a hole in the roof to get him to Jesus because the house was too crowded. Jesus told him to get up and walk and he did. The authorities were concerned because Jesus not only healed the man, but forgave him. Or in the Gospel of John chapter 9 there is a story of a man who had been blind from birth. Jesus spit on the ground to make mud which he then spread over the man's eyes and then told him to go wash in a place called the Pool of Siloam. When the man washed off the mud, he was able to see. And there is today's story of a woman Jesus healed at the synagogue where, surprisingly, the authorities questioned Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath, thus working on the day set aside for rest. It is hard for us to understand the objection. Clearly, the healing is more important than its day of the week or any other extenuation circumstance. The leaders were more concerned about religious things than they were about human things.

### Religious Things

At its best, religion is one of the best gifts given to the human race. It is the avenue towards a healthy spiritual life. Barriers to relational health are laid low and obstacles overcome. Our tradition tells us that every human being is valuable and must be treated with respect. This principle lays the foundation for the elimination of poverty and war,

racism, sexism, economic inequity and injustice. Religion also provides life disciplines through which individuals can deal successfully with the events of their lives; overcome hardship, sadness and despair, aging, and also achieve life's purpose, the fulfilling of one's potential. All this and more is possible when religion is at its best. We should not be too critical of the leaders of Jesus' day for being concerned about religious things.

Conversely, at its worst, religion is the greatest curse ever placed on the human race. It can turn us into caricatures of what we are meant to be as human beings. It can provide a rationale that allows us to ignore our weaknesses and vulnerabilities and helps us to preserve unhealthy realities and itself becomes a disease that needs to be overcome. Instead of setting free, it imprisons and allows for absurd contradictions. Instead of helping to achieve life's highest potential, it can plunge its followers into the depths of life's worst possibilities; violence, hatred, divisions caused by sub-human rivalries that deny the basic truth that every person is valuable.

One is reminded the denunciations of religious festivals like that found in Amos;

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals, your assemblies are a stench to me . . . Away with the noise of your songs. . ."

That rather harsh denunciation appears in Amos 5 where also is found the reasons why God so opposes their religious

expressions, “You turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. . . You trample the poor and force them to give you grain . . . You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.”

Rather, Amos has God say, “seek the Lord and live; seek good and not evil,” and then he finally reaches that familiar climax, “let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like an overflowing stream.”

One is also reminded of Jesus in Matthew 23 with his judgments against the Pharisees who were the most highly respected religious leaders of their day. He called them “hypocrites, white-washed tombs, snakes, a brood of vipers.” He asks them how they will escape being condemned to hell. It is clear that Jesus saved his angriest language and harshest judgments for the “best” people, while finding kind and compassionate words for oppressed sinners.

Or even Paul, who in his letters always managed to find an expression of joy and gratitude for his readers, almost no matter what they had done; except for the Galatians, for whom he had no positive thing to say. Their offense was their strict adherence to the religious ritual of circumcision.

The bible is consistent that the worst thing there is in human life is bad religion. And this while what the bible offers, is a religion.

## Human Things

The religion of Jesus, the religion that he can affirm, encourage, and offer to us as the best of things is the one that achieves in us the highest good, the best that we have the potential to accomplish. It is a religion that values human life even more than religion itself. It is compassionate, then kind, and filled with a love that sees the humanity in others no matter how hard it may be to see it.

To be able to see the humanness in others, not only past all the things that makes people different from each other, but also to see past one another’s sinfulness is religion’s chief accomplishment, and this vision sees everywhere, in the poor and in the rich, in the privileged and the oppressed, the straight and in the gay, in every race or ethnicity, in every education level or economic status or class, even in every religious expression. And this religion enables the vision to see the humanity of those most different in times of suffering and great joy. Speaking as a Christian, this ability to see, wherever it shows up, is the best testimony of Christ. Needless to say, it is too often as lacking as it is sorely needed.

Again, one is reminded of biblical images such as Jesus with the little children, “let the little children come to me, for to such as these is given the kingdom of God; or with the woman caught in the act to adultery, “let the one without sin cast the first stone; or any of the multitudes about which Matthew tells us, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and

helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” I can’t help also to think of the centurion, the woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon, the woman at the well in Samaria, the thief on the cross, and Peter with Cornelius or Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch.

### A Sabbath Healing

If the truth were known, I suppose all of us come to church each Sunday for a little healing. What better place to come to find healing from all the woundedness that hospitals can’t heal? This is church, and we have all kinds of religious things to be concerned with, doctrines and rituals and orders of service and budgets and bible studies and the like, the list goes on for quite a bit. It is naive to think there could ever be a church without these things or without the concern for them. But let them be a secondary concern.

The world is complex and life for the church is perplexing. But here, at our church, at least among us, wherever else, let the primary concern be the human things, things having to do with health, things of the Spirit, lest we end up like the religious ones who cared more about the observance of the Sabbath than the well-being of the woman who was healed. If we are thinking too much about of religious things, we are in danger of missing the point of our religion. Let us think about what it means to be human in the best sense; acceptance and grace and forgiveness. the language of love. Let what we do here rise above the noise of the world so that here the mud is cleared from our eyes so we can see, and our backs are straightened so we can stand up and look around,

where that miraculous Sabbath healing happens, and is celebrated instead of questioned, which is the healing of our souls, and our world.

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