

Lectionary 9

June 3, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark. (Mark 2:23 - 3:6)

One sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He 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." Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Xerox Corporation. I suspect most of you have heard of the Xerox Corporation. What do they do?

RESPONSE: They make copiers.

They make copiers. Since 1938, they have made great copiers. They are so linked to excellence in copiers that the name became a verb. "Would you xerox this sheet for me?"

What you may not know is that in 1970 the Xerox Corporation gathered together a group of grad students and aspiring computer scientists to work on new technologies. They created the Palo Alto Research Center in the heart of Silicon Valley, before there was a Silicon Valley. This creative, somewhat eccentric, group started innovating, and came up with some pretty cool technologies, like the personal computer, the mouse, and the laser printer, all in a Xerox research center.¹

What did you say Xerox is known for?

RESPONSE: Copiers.

Copiers. Xerox management did not see these other things as compatible with their work as producers of fine copiers, so they lost the opportunity to move into the future, because Xerox is not in the copier business. They are in the information business. And the way we process information changes over time. They forgot what they were about by focusing only on how they did it.

Remember Kodak? What did they do?

RESPONSE: Film.

Film. They were the best film producers in the world. Everybody wanted to be them. They had an eighty-nine percent market share. They made great cameras and great camera supplies. What you may not know is that in 1975 a Kodak engineer, Steve Sasson, developed the first digital camera. He later said, "It was filmless technology, so management's reaction was: 'That's cute. But don't tell anybody about it.'"² Digital photography was not compatible with their work as great producers of film. But they were not in the film business. They were in the visual arts business, and visual art changes over time. They forgot what they were about by focusing on how they did it.

Now let's talk about Pharisees. We know Pharisees as the bad guys; the ones who were always picking a fight with Jesus, or sometimes vice versa. Already by the Second Chapter of Mark, the scribes and Pharisees had confronted Jesus about forgiving sins, eating with tax collectors and sinners, not fasting, and working on the sabbath. Four confrontations in about one chapter. And now they are conspiring with local politicians to destroy Jesus.

You know, the Pharisees weren't always the bad guys. Truth be told, they were the liberal theologians of their day. They believed that the Messiah would come, and the dead would be raised, and God would reign over all things. Theologically, Jesus was a Pharisee. They were the good church people, the church leaders. In many ways, they were us.

¹ "Xerox Was Actually First To Invent The PC". BusinessInsider.com <http://www.businessinsider.com/xerox-was-actually-first-to-invent-the-pc-they-just-forgot-to-do-anything-with-it-2012-2>. Accessed 5/26/2018

² "At Kodak, Some Old things Are New Again" NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/02/technology/02kodak.html>, accessed 5/26/2018

So what happened? Why did they end up conspiring to kill the very God they worshipped? I don't think they were bad people. I don't think they woke up one morning and said, "Oooo – let's figure out how to kill God."

I think, over time, they became so focused on what they were supposed to be doing that they forgot what it was all for. Like Xerox forgetting about information technology, and Kodak forgetting about visual arts, the Pharisees forgot that they were in the business of serving the living God. And when Jesus came and started serving God in new and creative ways, all they could ask was, "*Why are they not doing what is lawful on the sabbath?*"

"What's lawful on the sabbath." The sabbath is not a set of rules. The sabbath is an amazing, life-giving practice that shows us who God is and what God gives. It is a day of pure grace – no guilt, no requirement. And who wouldn't love that? It is a chance to stop working and worrying for a while and trust that God has got your back. And there are lots of ways to do that. It is a chance to enjoy the life God gives. A chance to step out of the news cycle, the work demands, the economic system, and just be, not do. And there are a lot of ways to do that.

Some people try to focus their sabbath, so they will include a screen sabbath, staying away from technology, so they can be a little less anxious and a little more mindful. Some focus their sabbath on not buying things, to remember that God provides. It's a practice that we grow with. It's a means for discovering God. It is not a set of rules: "*Why are they doing what's not lawful on the sabbath?*"

Not lawful on the sabbath? Hey, I'll admit, nine times out of ten, I screw up my practice of sabbath. Since I work on Sunday, my sabbath is often on Monday, and I slow down. I take time for devotion or prayer in the morning. And then I'll hike, or curl up with a good book, or bake bread, or something that I find life giving. But often I'll think, "Oh, I forgot. I need to answer that email." And I'll grab for my phone and send out a quick email. And then I'll think, "Oops, that's not sabbath." Or I'll be making dinner and I'll need an ingredient and I will run off to the store. And on the way back I'll think, "Oh, so much for an economic sabbath."

But I'm learning. I'm learning to honor a day in God's presence. I'm learning to trust the God who provides. I'm learning to rejoice in the abundance of creation. I'm learning to rest in God's care and not always be in control. And isn't that the point? Isn't that the point over all of the world? The Pharisees forgot the point of it all. They didn't look beyond the "how" to the "why."

And what about the Christian church today? Are we in danger of joining Xerox or Kodak or the Pharisees? Have we lost what we're about as we work harder and harder at how we've always done it? The Christian church has a sad history of ecclesiastical battles, trying to decide who's in and out – of clergy abuse and conspiracies to hide it, of congregations imploding over worship styles, or political differences, or about color of

the new carpet. A sad history of focusing inward, in isolation from the world. Of forgetting what we are really about.

So what are we really about? If we're not the Pharisees, standing up for the way that it needs to be done, what is it we are about? In the midst of ecclesiastical battles, a hurting world, and a largely indifferent culture, who are we?

This I know for sure: we are not the morality police, making sure all of the rules and commandments get followed. We are not the theological purity guards, making sure everybody believes all the right things. We are not in charge of institutional survival. We are not counselors, or social workers, or activist. We may do those things, but it's not what we are.

We are, and always have been, disciples of Jesus Christ. We have discovered something life giving in the words of Jesus. We have discovered there is resurrection after loss or death. We have experienced forgiveness, and community, and a sense of purpose. We have seen how the compassion of Christ can heal and transform. And we want that for ourselves and our world. We want Christ to shape us. We want to be people formed by Christ's loving, life-giving presence. We are disciples. We are students of Christ. We are learners.

And we will always be learning new things about the living God. We will always be trying new ways to offer the compassion and faithfulness of God. We will always be surprised at the possibilities that the Holy Spirit sets out right in front of us. "*Why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?*" is way too small a question. How can the love of God transform our lives? That is a good question.

How can we learn to trust God? How can we learn to forgive and be forgiven? How can we hear the Spirit's voice? How can we show Christ's compassion in our neighborhood? Those are big questions about who we are and what we're about. And those need to guide how we do it, how we act in the world, as individuals and as a church.

You may or may not have heard that Immanuel has entered a season of discernment. We are looking at the ways we do things around here. The way we organize to get things done – committees and council and top down. And we're asking, "Is the way we did things a hundred years ago really the way we should be doing them today?" We're asking, "Who is keeping an eye on the big questions?" "How can we answer those big questions in creative and innovative ways?" In other words, we're asking, how can we be disciples and not Pharisees? It's all very scary, and disruptive, and Spirit filled, and hopeful.

The council has been at this work since February, and we're learning a lot. And we're asking you to walk with us, to pay attention, to ask good questions, and to pray for wisdom. Joe Defresne - there he is - will be talking about this a little bit at our "State of

the Church” report during coffee hour today. But more info will be coming over the summer.

It’s exciting to be a disciple of Christ in these days. There are so many new opportunities, so many ways how to answer the big questions. There is such hunger for what we have to offer, and such a need for compassion and life in this world. It is an energizing and hopeful time.

We are not the Xerox Corporation. We are not Kodak. We are not the Pharisees.

We get to be disciples of Jesus Christ!

Can I have an “Amen” on that one?

RESPONSE: Amen!

Amen.