



You just witnessed how people can respond to laws. There are ruler followers, rule breakers and then there are those who embrace the rules. Which one are you? Share it with the person sitting next to you. In today's gospel we come across a group of rule followers who get very upset with Jesus and accuse him of breaking the law.

Read Luke 6:1-11

The Pharisees and scribes are religious leaders at the time of Jesus. It was their "duty" to make sure that the laws of God were followed, perfectly. They were "overseers" of the law. When someone broke a law then there would be severe consequences. According to the text we just read, the religious leaders accused Jesus of breaking the law, not once, but twice!!! Jesus broke the law, "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy" And they were mad as hornets! Why was this Sabbath Law even given? Where did it come from?

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy was originally a gift that God gave the people. It is one of the 10 Commandments. After working hard, 24/7 as slaves for the Egyptians, God lovingly gave the Israelites a day off. The Sabbath was for the people of God, because God wanted the very best for them. The religious leaders took a love inspired gift and made it totally unenjoyable.

The religious leaders were performance orientated. Their relationship with God was based on how well they kept the commandments. Therefore, laws were enacted to ensure that everyone followed the law, followed the rules, kept the Sabbath. A person simply could not work on the Sabbath. The Sabbath became a burden rather than a gift.

Jesus' interactions with the religious rulers showed them how far off base the Sabbath observance had become. In our text Jesus "worked" on the Sabbath. He ate from a field with his followers and then he healed a person. Both were seen as "work".

Jesus showed them a different way of living out the Sabbath. He opens up the meaning of the Sabbath as a gift, as a time for renewal and healing. He never says that the Sabbath is a bad law and that it should be thrown out. He embraces what the Sabbath was meant to be for all of us, a time of healing and renewal. Jesus reveals that God's love for us isn't about following laws, God loves us no matter what. There was a disconnect between keeping the law to show God you loved God and living the law as a gift from God.

The religious leaders and followers believed that following the 10 commandments meant keeping in good graces with God. If you followed the commandments and didn't break them then God would be pleased and you would earn favor with God. It was a way of staying on the "good side" of God. There was a belief that if you were "good" God would love you more. And if you were "bad" God would be made at you.

There are people in Jerusalem who still follow the Sabbath in hopes of pleasing God. A few years ago I was in Jerusalem. I was staying at the King David hotel, the 12th floor. We arrived on a Thursday. Friday evening a few of us decided to go into the city to the temple wall. We were in a hurry. You can only imagine how frustrated we were when we got into the elevator and every single floor button had been pushed. We stopped at every floor from 12 all the way to the lobby, and no one got on or off! Ugh!!! Someone's idea of a joke wasn't funny! When we returned late that evening, the same person must have hit all those elevator buttons. It stopped on every floor until we got to 12. Ugh! The next morning was the same. Trying to get down for breakfast was so irritating, stopping at each floor. I had had enough so I went to the front desk to complain. Only to find out there was no person running and punching all the floor buttons. I was told the elevator was set for Sabbath. No one can work on Sabbath which is Friday Sundown to Saturday sundown, work included pushing elevator buttons, so they automatically were set every Sabbath to stop at each floor so that no one would have to work to push a button.

I think that some of us today still find ourselves struggling to be in a relationship with God by following the rules, following the law so that God would love us.

Before I went to seminary I worked as a commodity trader at Cargill. It was during my time at Cargill that I chose to go to seminary. When I told my colleagues about seminary, the strangest thing started happening to me at work. People started telling me about their religious practices. I heard everything from “I am not a season ticket holder in any church” to “I read my bible every day”. People I didn’t even know would stop me in the halls and let me know that they had a pastor in their family, or that they were in bible study, that they went to church every week or that they prayed every day.

I found this interesting on several levels. 1) They had seen me around for several years and never revealed to me that they had all of these ‘religious’ things in their lives. 2) They must have thought I had some kind of influence with God now that I was going to seminary and it may help them in the future. (how I wish that I had that kind of power, but no that is not how it works, I am still just Sandy. 3) There was a thought that if you did certain religious practices that you were going to be accepted by God, by following the rules. Jesus came to show us a different way. His way was a way of love, a way of service, a way of healing. And when we judge ourselves against the law, we miss out on the beautiful gift that has been given to us. For instance, if we only go to worship, or read my bible or pray, or rest on the Sabbath so that God would love us more, we’ve got it all wrong, God can’t love us more than God already does.

God has given each of us a gift. To remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Jesus lived it by taking time out of his busy week and setting it aside to worship. To give God thanks for life, for healing, healing of relationships, of body, mind and spirit.

We are all busy people. Our lives are scheduled to the max. There is always something to do, something to watch on Television, something to listen to, something to clean, to organize, to cook, to buy. There is no end to what options we have at our fingertips. And doing everything or thinking we have to do everything leaves us tired and worn out.

Jesus has given us a life giving gift. He has let us know that God never intended the Sabbath Law as a way to earn his love, in fact there is nothing we can do to earn God’s love. God already loves us more than we could ever imagine. And he gave us the gift of Sabbath,

Sabbath is a time to stop, slow down, worship. Sabbath is a time to be refreshed, renewed and revived. Sabbath is a time to love.

You and I have been given a gift, the Sabbath. How will you enjoy the gift of Sabbath today?