

Theme: -Ethical

-Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy

-set free - mercy shall reign

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August 22, 2010

Law or Mercy: Which is Right?

Luke 13:10-17

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There are times in our lives when we are wedged between a rock and a hard place. Do you select something that is right or something that is good? Do you select that which is truthful or that which is kind? Do you select that which is legal or that which is prudent? We tend to call these the gray areas of life; decisions that could go either way depending upon the situation and how life has been treating you lately. And it is very likely that when we face those gray areas of life someone will question why we did what we did, causing us to at least question in our own minds if we made the correct decision.

If I asked you recite Exodus 20:8-11 we probably couldn't do it but if I read it you would certainly have an opinion of how it was telling us to live. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord, your God: in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or daughter, your male or female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

In our generation the seventh day is just as busy as the other six days of the week. Still I'm old enough to remember when it was hard to find a store of any type open on Sunday. Today just about everything is open, so when are we to rest? When do you take a Sabbath day if rest?

We pick up our lesson with Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath and suddenly Jesus is faced with one of those gray areas of life decision – honor the Sabbath day or heal a woman plagued with sickness for 18 years. As the Son of God Jesus surely knew the law of honoring the Sabbath day but as the Son of God Jesus also know He came to heal and forgive. So which is right? I know some of the legalistic people in the congregation might say, "If she endured 18 years, she could make it one more day, Jesus could heal her tomorrow and keep the Sabbath too!"

The point is this: at times life places difficult choices square in our face and we have to choose between two very good choices. The choice we make speaks volumes about who we are and what we believe. For Jesus people were more important than rules, health was more important than piety and the hurting one was more important than the powerful one.

In Mark 2 as the Pharisees were questioning Jesus about Jesus' disciples picking grain to eat on the Sabbath, Jesus answered their questioning by saying, "The Sabbath was made for people and not people made for the Sabbath."

What are those ethical dilemmas that you might be facing today? For some the dilemma is this: do I follow the teachings of the church or live what I feel is right. I have heard more than one former Roman Catholic who has come to the Presbyterian Church because they couldn't live with what the Roman Catholic Church was teaching. Then I have also heard of more Presbyterians than I would like to admit say they are leaving the denomination because they

can't be a part of some of its teachings. These are ethical decisions; our choice points us in a particular direction. Just as our choosing to come to worship or stay away from worship points us in a particular direction. Jesus pointed towards people.

Did you catch the play on words Jesus placed before the religious leaders? If Jesus were here today he would have said, you set free your animals to drink; I set free a woman from bondage. Maybe the Sabbath is to set us free, release us from the fetters that hold us away from being our true self and hold us away from truly honoring God? Maybe we are being set free to care for one another in a way that we have never seen before? Maybe this passage is not so much about a woman who was healed on the Sabbath as it is a story for us to hear that Jesus has come to set us free from whatever over occupies our life?

I close with this story – as you may know I've been allowed to be a chaplain for all the law enforcement agencies of LaCrosse County. One of our duties as chaplain is to do what is called a ride-a-long. Yes I was required to wearing bullet proof vest. Anyway two cars were called to investigate a noise problem around 2:30 a.m. and quickly after our arrival the two officers were citing three young people for underage drinking. One young lady had taken her mother's drivers license and changed the birth date on that license passing it off as her license. With all the calm and compassion the officer could muster he said; "I could place you in jail for this offense, but I will merely write you a ticket and you will have to appear in court on this charge, do you understand?"

Law or mercy: which is right? What will you do when you are faced with a gray area decision today, tomorrow or even next week? I believe Jesus came to set us free and our gray area decisions should likewise set ourselves and other people free. When you come across that next decision think about the lady who was bent over for 18 years and how Jesus released her when you make your decisions.