

XVII Trinity 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

Ephesians 4.1-6 St. Luke 14.1-11



Today's headlines from the Jerusalem Times: "Jesus has lunch with an important religious leader on the Sabbath Day...and he healed a man."

From our perspective as 21st Century Christians...that isn't a shocking headline. We know Jesus healed people all the time...at any hour...any day of the week. But this was the Sabbath Day...the Day on which according to the Fourth Commandment...we are to refrain from doing any work.

The Pharisee...the religious leader...who invited Jesus to lunch wasn't interested in what he had to say...he was more interested in seeing what Jesus would do. The Gospel tells us everyone was watching him closely.

A man who had dropsy came to Jesus for help. Dropsy is an old word for edema...a swelling of the arms and legs from excess water retention...that would have caused the man pain when he walked.

Jesus knows the Pharisees are trying to set him up. He asks them if it is OK to heal someone on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and lawyers held a literalistic interpretation of the Fourth Commandment...no work on the Sabbath...and they left little room for discussion. But no one answered. So, Jesus heals the man with the swollen arms and legs and sends him on his way.

Jesus then asked if anyone wouldn't immediately rescue an ox or a son who fell into a well on the Sabbath. Again, no one answered. What he did was make it impossible for the Pharisees and lawyers to answer either question. If they said "no" to work on the Sabbath, but said "yes" to pulling an ox or son out of a well on the Sabbath, they would have made themselves look ridiculous for contradicting their own strict interpretation of the Fourth Commandment.

Jesus might have said, "Gotcha"! But he didn't. As he watches other guests push each other out of the way to get seats closer to the host, he seizes on the opportunity to teach a lesson in table manners. He tells the short

story about a wedding feast. He cautions the people sitting around him not to choose the best seats when they are invited to a wedding feast. They might be asked to move...think how embarrassed they will be. Instead take seats further away from the host...he might ask you to take better seats...then think how honored they will be.

In healing the man with the swollen arms and legs and in telling the story about which seats to take at a wedding feast...Jesus shows contempt toward certain attitudes and principles of the Pharisees and other religious leaders.

First, Jesus makes it clear that compassion, humility and hospitality toward others must always take precedence over ecclesiastical rules and regulations. God is not impressed with liturgical ceremonial if love for others is not present in what we do.

Second, the lesson we should take away from the short story about the wedding feast and the Parable of the Great Feast we heard on the Second Sunday after Trinity...is we shouldn't think of ourselves as more important in the World than we really are. People who think that way exclude themselves from a place in God's Kingdom.

Christians are still obligated to keep the Fourth Commandment...keep the Sabbath Day holy. Sunday is sometimes called the Christian Sabbath...it is more properly called the Lord's Day. Jesus healed the man in today's Gospel on the Sabbath Day and he must have healed many more on the Sabbath. In Mark's Gospel, he tells us the Sabbath was made for us...we weren't made for the Sabbath. It's OK...for many of us even a necessity...to work on the Sabbath or Sunday.

God gives us seven days in the week. We should make every effort to keep Sunday holy by coming to Mass, hearing God's Word, and receiving Holy Communion. But all work and no rest is not a good idea. We dishonor God when we don't give ourselves time to rest and get ready for the week ahead. If we have to work on the weekend, we can make another day our Sabbath.

Jesus heals on the Sabbath because he is Lord of the Sabbath. We glorify God when we show compassion, humility and hospitality toward others...every day of the week.

