

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN

Mark 2:23–3:6

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

23One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" 25And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26He 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." 27Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

3.1Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4Then 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. 5He 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. 6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

DIAGNOSIS: It's All Wrong

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): You can't do that!

"You can't do that! You're not allowed!" Whatever it is we are being told not to do, we are going to do it. We want to do it. If it is a child going against the parent's wishes, or breaking into someone's house, or buying heroin, or physically or verbally hitting a loved one, we will do it. We don't care.

There will always be others who will tell us not to do the wrong thing. They don't want to get caught. They are afraid of retribution—that is, the punishment forced upon those who do wrong. Of course, who decides what is wrong? Then there are arguments about the interpretation of what exactly is wrong and maybe if we looked at it in another way, then it is not really wrong.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Trust Is in the Law

All this concern about doing right and wrong is because all people live under the law—no exceptions. It is by doing what the law demands that we feel right. Not only do we judge ourselves to be right, but we want the judgment of others to lift us up in our rightness. Even more, for some who say they have faith in their god, they say that doing right is how they live out their faith in their god. People say that they can't serve a person, can't help a person, can't respect a person, because that other person is wrong and goes against their god's commands. The focus is so much on what is right and wrong that we all forget that the law has a boss, and that boss is love. But mistakenly, people want to keep the law as if the law is void of love. It's the attitude of, "I don't care how I treat you. All that matters is how I look to my god."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): God says, "You're all wrong."

But we have been tricked, deceived; with great sneakiness our faith in God has been moved over to faith in doing what is

right. Our faith is in the law. We argue, disagree, quibble, fight, quarrel, and bicker, all so that we can win, look good, and honor our god called law. We have forsaken God the Creator for one of God's creations (see Romans 1). The one who goes against God must die. Death is the ultimate declaration of "You're wrong!"

PROGNOSIS: It's All Mercy

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Is Lord over Death for Our Sake

Jesus was told he was wrong for picking grain on the Day of Rest; and for healing on the Day of Rest. Such actions were against God's law. Those who said Jesus was wrong eventually acted on their plan and destroyed Jesus on a cross. Yet Jesus is Lord of the Day of Rest, even the rest that is death. He rose from the dead, now not only Lord of the sabbath but Lord over death, all for our sake, to rule over our deaths in order to raise us to new life.

Step 5. Advanced Prognosis (External Solution): Jesus says, "You are all good."

Doing what is right has never stopped Death from saying we are wrong, or from accusing us of trusting the law rather than God who gave the law. But Jesus has stopped all accusations against us. When accused of picking grain, Jesus silenced the accusation with his authority as Lord, as God. When he asked if it was lawful to work doing good or to do harm, and he received no answer, as if the accusers were ready to trap him the moment he did anything, he silenced the accusation by his work of mercy. He showed all that mercy was the way to worship God, to obey God. So now any accusation against us is silenced by the Lord of Mercy. We trust him to make us good and right with God by his mercy, not by making demands of us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We tell others, "Jesus makes you good."

Our daily lives are filled with accusations, filled with retribution, filled with the evaluation of everything humans do: people fret and worry about how well they have done what they were told to do; some even frantically try to fill their lives with fun activities to convince themselves that life is good. In the face of such burdens, we believers get to tell those who fret that Jesus has already made them good. Jesus has made them right with God. We get to silence accusations by giving mercy and forgiveness. We get to stop accusing others—even take the blame ourselves, and instead say words of kindness, of peace, of healing, of hope, and the promise of eternal life.