

Year B, June 3, 2018  
2 Pentecost (Proper 4)  
Christ Church, Mexia

As we begin our long season of Ordinary Time, let me tell you a story: "On his sixteenth birthday the son approached his father and said, 'Dad, I'm sixteen now. When I get my license, can I drive the family car?' His dad looked at him and said, 'Son, driving the car takes maturity, and first, you must prove you are responsible enough. And one way you must do that is to bring up your grades. They are not acceptable (now). Second, you must read the Bible every day. And finally, I want you to get that hair cut; it looks outrageous.' The son began the task of fulfilling his father's requirements, knowing that the last might be impossible.

When his grades came out he came to his dad with a big smile. 'Look, Dad, all A's and B's on my report card. Now can I drive the family car?' 'Very good, Son. You are one-third of the way there, but have you been reading the Bible?' the father replied. 'Yes, Dad, every day,' said the son. 'Very good, Son. You are two-thirds of the way there. Now when are you going to get your haircut?' The son, thinking he could outsmart his dad, responded, 'Well, I don't see why I should get my hair cut to drive the car. Jesus had long hair, didn't he?' The father looked at his boy and said, 'That's right, Son, and Jesus walked everywhere he went.'" (Hodgin, 635)

Rules! Since the beginning of civilization, we have attempted to set norms for behavior by creating rules or laws. They were particularly necessary in the very earliest of times when people were generally uneducated and couldn't be expected to behave reasonably according to their own reckoning. Of course, even educated people don't necessarily obey or uphold the laws today, so it wasn't about education entirely. Rather it is about what needs to be done for us to live peacefully together. How will we live in relationship to one another on good terms?

God gave his people, Israel, the Ten Commandments after freeing them from bondage in Egypt because they seemed to need some guidance to live in the way God expected them to live, hoped they would live. Then religious leaders of the years that followed added hundreds of laws in order to insure people would be "righteous" in God's sight. And this is what we see in the gospel reading today.

Jesus' disciples are grabbing a few grains as they walk through the fields one fine Sabbath day. This violates one of the many rules or laws concerning the Sabbath and keeping it "holy." This is the first act that draws the ire of the religious leaders. And Jesus enjoins them not to put the emphasis on the wrong syllable, so to speak, or to lose perspective of what is really important.

We have a lot of canons in the church, even today, about many things. We have certain norms for the way we conduct the liturgy that are outlined in the BCP and other documents. They are helpful for us to feel comfortable in worship – as an aid to help us focus on the important aspects of our worship and to help us be fulfilled in our experience. But how would you feel if I were to become the "liturgy police," correcting you, for example, if you gave the wrong response to "The Lord be with you," in Rite I when you may say "And also with you," while the "correct" response is "And with thy spirit." Is it more important for you to be comfortable and joyful in worship, or must every word and movement be correct? What would such pressure do to your worship experience? Is God offended by such minute deviations? I should think not!

And then Jesus has the audacity to heal a man on the Sabbath, in the synagogue no less. And they begin to plot against him – trying to figure out how to destroy him. For these minor infractions of the "law?" He alleviated the suffering of a human being, chose a person over the law. Was this the beginning of that saying, "No good deed ever goes unpunished?" A study by Mitroff and Denton regarding spirituality in the workplace discovered that: "Religion is largely viewed as formal and organized. It is also viewed as dogmatic, intolerant, and dividing people more than bringing them together." Sadly, too often religious people are guilty of encouraging such observations.

I don't think that Jesus was a lawless person. He was counter-cultural for sure, but he said that he didn't come to abolish the law. And certainly, some rules or laws are good, but there will almost always be exceptions. Isn't that essentially why we have a court system, Judge? Someone must decide how, or in some cases whether or not, the law should be enforced as written? And sometimes we need to make decisions in the absence of clear rules/laws. And especially in those times, but in all times, we should refer to the actions and decisions Jesus modeled for us, as revealed in the Bible. Jesus told us to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor – even our enemies. Those thoughts are the basis for the law or our decision-

making. WWJD may seem trite when we reduce it to those four letters, but Jesus lived as God wishes us to live. That is how we should decide what is the right course of action. Love should be the guiding principle. The welfare of the person or persons must be paramount, rather than the rule in the following story: A man crashed the plane he was flying in a desert. Having no communication capability or any water, he began to walk through the scorching sands. Soon he was crawling and encountered a necktie salesman. "Can I interest you in a nice new tie?" he asked. "Are you crazy? I'm dying of thirst. I don't need a tie." The salesman shrugged and walked away. The dying man kept crawling until he saw a beautiful sight – an enormous, magnificent restaurant was before him in the desert. The man crawled as fast as he could to the door and managed weakly to exclaim to the doorman, "Please help me. I must have something to drink." To which the doorman replied, "I'm sorry, sir, gentlemen must be wearing a tie to be served here." Really? Jesus asks us today to consider what is most important in each situation, and to let love inform our decision.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.