

Sermon: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 14:1-14 (v. 3)

Theme: Rule keeping – or the welfare of people?

Goal: That the hearers will focus more in the welfare of people than of keeping church's rules

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Jesus broke one of the most important rules of the Jewish church: The Sabbath. And this was not the first time He did it. The Gospels record seven miracles performed by Jesus on a Sabbath; and all of them were followed by discussions with the Pharisees about the need of keeping the Law.

Usually the meals on Sabbath day were very special cold meals, prepared the day before, because they were not allowed to light fire on Sabbath. Jesus was invited to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee. I wonder at this invitation; because the Pharisees were always criticizing Jesus. But there was a second intention behind this invitation: The Pharisees had set a trap for Jesus; and Jesus “was carefully watched”. “There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy.” *Dropsy is a disease we more often call edema. It is the accumulation of fluid which causes swelling, often incapacitating, or painful. This disease is very visible; one cannot help but notice dropsy* (Phil Brandt, p. 34). And whoever had this disease was considered impure, an outcast. How could such a man be at the Sabbath meal in the Pharisee's house? - He was like a living goat put into a trap to catch a lion or a leopard. However, Jesus was aware of what was happening. His question to the Pharisees and the experts in the Law present at the banquet leaved them without answer: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” And Jesus healed the man.

I – Do we need laws and rules?

Of course we need laws and rules. God Himself gave us the Ten Commandments; and they are still valid for us. We have the Church's Constitution, and we have several other laws, which help us to keep order in the church. It is the same in the society: We have the Traffic Rules, the Security Rules, each category of workers has its how to do rules and guidelines. Without rules it would be impossible to live in this world. Not only Christians have to obey the Law, but everyone. From the disobedience to the common laws come the crimes, robbery, murders, etc.

But let us take an example: There is a sign on the roadside that means "*It's prohibited to stop*". But just in front of us an accident happens and maybe I am the only one there who can help. Can I stop? But the sign says that I can't! What is more important? The sign, or the life of the person who may be injured in the accident?

This was the situation Jesus faced at the meal on a Sabbath. For Jesus, the sick person was more important than the Sabbath Law. The Sabbath was created by God to give a day of rest to people and to animals. But the Pharisees had added so many details to that Law that it was almost impossible to know all of them. And Jesus knew that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Therefore, He asked them: "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?"

The Pharisees are fundamentally out step with God. Our human nature thinks it is about keeping the rules, as if keeping the rules satisfies God somehow... We often major in the minors... forgetting that God cares about the human being. - We encourage the keeping of the Ten Commandments not because of our or even God's

holiness but because it is good for people to live this way. (Phil Brandt pp.32,33).

II – Jesus kept the Law 100 percent for us

And we know that we are unable to keep the Law 100 percent. We try our best; but we always have to come before God and have to confess Him: *“I, a poor and miserable sinner, confess to You all my sins and iniquities...”* There is only one who fully kept the Law: Jesus – even that He broke the Church’s Law several times, because they were not God’s Law. And He broke it out of love for people, to help people in their needs. For Jesus, people and their needs had always priority in His ministry, and He always took time to listen to their needs, to share His love to them, to help them. Even on His way to the cross, pressed by the soldiers to carry His cross, He stopped for a while to comfort the women who were crying for His sufferings. And hanging on the cross, He took time to give hope to the robber hanging side by side with Him.

Jesus completely accomplished the Law on our behalf, to give us His righteousness. He didn’t need it, because He is righteous. But when He became man, He did everything that God was requiring from humankind due to our sins and disobedience to conquer righteousness. And once conquered by His perfect obedience, by His death on the cross, and by His glorious resurrection, He offers His righteousness to all who repent and believe in Him. Our sins are His sins; His righteousness is our righteousness. We are new creatures, accepted by God as His beloved children.

III – The new Commandment: love your neighbor

To His disciples, Jesus says: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one

another" (John 13:34). Having this in mind, Jesus broke the Jewish Church's Law and healed the man on a Sabbath. Having this in mind, Jesus told His host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner... invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Next Sunday we will have our Disability Awareness Service. Those mentioned by Jesus shall never be forgotten by us and we shall share with them our food and our love. It is not just a matter of food, but a matter of attention: They cannot be ignored in their needs. This means "love your neighbor".

Conclusion: I speak now for myself, but I know that this is the situation with many of us: God invites us to His house, He talks to us, He listen to our prayers, He accepts our praise and thanksgiving, He invites us to His Holy Table to share with us the Holy Bread and Wine of the Body and Blood of His Son – and we are sometimes so concerned to follow our liturgy, to accomplish our duties as pastor, as Elders, as ushers, as responsible for coffee and tea, - that we don't note the need of someone seated just next of us. The needs are not always visible like the one of the sick man seated in front of Jesus in our Gospel for today; but a smile, a hug, a "*good morning, how are you?*" is sometimes enough. And again, I speak on my behalf, after the Service we rush so much because we have to go home that sometimes I miss to greet some people.

Remember: People are more important than rules and more important than the clock. Take time to show your love to each of your brothers and sisters, not just to your friends. Take time to talk to the visitors and to welcome them to our fellowship. If necessary, to break some of our church's traditions is not that big sin if we please God loving our neighbor. Amen.