

Trinity 17

I take as my text today from the Gospel of St. Luke:

And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? And they held their peace.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

We know from scripture that there were strict laws for what a person could do on the Sabbath and Jesus was frequently perceived as being in violation of the Sabbath.

So, perhaps, there was another, more pertinent question, especially if we look at the healing of the man with dropsy from our Lord’s perspective. Was Jesus really asking, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?”

What we are seeing more and more revealed by our Lord is the idea that the Jews had reached a stage where the practice of religion was the focus of their worship, rather than God.

By this, the Law, the Law of Moses, over time had become so convoluted that it was impossible to truly follow; yet, the Law had become the focal point of their religion.

Their practice of religion had evolved to the point that, from their perspective, it was the Law that would save them. They turned more and more from focusing on God to focusing on the Law and its intricacies.

What was missing? Very simply, that which is the very nature of God and should be at the forefront of all our lives: simply, Love.

Are we not created out of love? Was not everything created out of love? If so, should we not then focus our lives on the very nature of our creation, of all of creation?

However we may practice our religion, it is of naught if it is without love.

Isn't it rather paradoxical that Jesus was considered a lawbreaker and a dangerous and irreligious man because He did good regardless of the day of the week?

The scribes and Pharisees were contemptuous of our Lord. And why shouldn't they be — He was cutting to the core. Thus, could it not be that their contempt was so exaggerated because they knew He was right?

Jesus had asked pertinent questions, on more than one occasion, using the phrase, "Is it not lawful?" Now, once again, with a person suffering from dropsy, He poses the same question.

The Scribes and Pharisees, knowing that they could only answer in the affirmative, that it was indeed lawful, kept their peace. This they did so as to convict our Lord by their silence. But, at the same time, they were convicting themselves.

Jesus was a radical in that time. His focus on God, God's love, love itself as basic to our nature, challenged the whole religious system. Love as a basis of the relationship between God and man, and between each other, was just so foreign to their thinking.

So, let's fast forward two thousand or so years to today's world where we find all the technology, the advancement of knowledge, and all the possibilities to do good. What has changed from that of Biblical times?

Today, in the now, is our practice of religion based on love or is it still institution-focused?

Without a doubt, the visible Church must be an institution in order to maintain the faith as once delivered by our Lord to and through His Apostles.

But, the institution — that is the Church — in and of itself is not the problem. The failings of the Church as an institution do not represent the failings of God but the failings of men.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul addresses Christian Unity and charges us as Christians to work to maintain a visible unity in the Church, a new “society.”

This Unity, however, is tied to Purity. The "oneness" of the new society, this Family in Christ, its unity, depends on Purity. And, this purity is our character and conduct, the kind of life we must live within the fellowship of the Christian Church.

What is this kind of life we must live?

Like our Lord, it is doing good every day of our lives. It is emulating our Lord, not only by doing good but also by living up to the standards He has set for us.

No one who wishes to be called a Christian can be exempted from the moral qualities that are the foundation stones of the Christian character.

St. Paul lists these as five essential qualities: lowliness, meekness, patience, mutual forbearance, and love, all of which must be reflected in each of us.

Moreover, these qualities are essential in bringing about Christian Unity.

It is the task of the Church and of each individual Christian to be instruments of our Lord in bringing about an universal reconciliation between individuals within the world and with God.

In keeping with St. Paul's focus, especially as expressed in the 13th chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians, it is through love that we are able to accomplish all things. We all most certainly remember those beautiful words defining forever Faith, Hope, and Charity; Charity as Love, being the greatest of the three. There can be no Faith, no Hope, without Love.

Thus, we may ask: do we truly embrace our fellow human beings, God's creatures, with love?

By love, we do not mean sentimental love; we mean the love of God that wells up within our hearts and overflows into our lives. It is the love that compels us to do good. It is the love that allows us to see good in all of God's creation, especially in our fellow man.

Without this love, we are materially bound and forever separated from God.

It is not the externals that save us. It is the love that wells up within our hearts.

Truly, our practice of religion should be reflected in the love we have and demonstrate: love of God, love of all God's creation, and love of each other.

If we indeed have that love, we, like Jesus, would be predisposed to doing good every day of the week — even the Sabbath.