

Pentecost 3B / June 3, 2018  
Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's  
Deuteronomy 5:12-15  
2 Corinthians 4:5-12  
Mark 2:23 – 3:6

In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of Israel what laws God had given them. One law was to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. Over the years this morphed into a collection of rules that governed what could or could not be done on the Sabbath Day.

I remember visiting my aunt and uncle in Florida. They were Methodists – strict Methodists. Aunt Marion would prepare all foods, do all the laundry, finish all of the housework on Saturdays. No work of any kind was to be done on Sundays.

In today's Gospel lesson, the Pharisees were angry with Jesus because he allowed the picking of wheat from the shaft on the Sabbath Day. He was angry with them because they mis-applied the law of the Sabbath. Let's explore that a bit more...

For 15 years I worked in Cupertino. I wrote monthly reports that were distributed to my boss and to development engineering management, along with other managers in manufacturing and sales. One month I got a phone call from my boss, to talk about an engineering visit I reported on. He asked why I had praised the fine work of a product manager, who had visited some of our Bay Area customers. I told him that this manager had really done a good job, knew his product, spoke well, and did a great job representing the company. I was set straight by my boss. "Don't ever do that again. Don't ever praise somebody for doing their job."

The rule I was being taught was to be stingy about complimenting or recognizing somebody for doing a good job. I immediately rejected the rule. Later in my career under that boss, he told me that I wasn't a team player. Actually, that was a team I did not want to play on.

One more story; about a student in our preschool. This child began coming to Little Bridges only about 3-4 months ago. The mother told us that she had problems with the previous school, so they decided to move him. What we soon learned was that if something unexpected happened, he would lose control; crying so that 3 or 4 times we had to call mom to take him home. One day he hit another student. Not enough to hurt the other child, but hitting cannot be allowed. He was very sorry. But we have rules.

He was sent home for the day. I asked our Director to talk with the mom about what happened. By then we knew that the problem was dealing with changes in routine, or loud activities. This wasn't about being a bully. I asked Stela to have the mom and dad reinforce the message that hitting would result in his not being allowed to come to Little Bridges. I asked Stela and the teachers to find out what his triggers were, and to see if we can find a way to have him learn here how to control his outbursts.

The process took a couple of months. We learned that this boy had shown the same behavior at home, and at a few other schools. But the other schools couldn't work it out. Our teachers – especially Ms. Casey – showed mountains of patience mixed with insistence on a code of conduct. This little boy graduated from preschool last Friday night. He never hit anyone again. We chose to not live strictly by the rules, in favor of living by the heart – and not by our heart – but by the heart of God. I think there is a good chance that we gave this little five year old and his parents a new beginning.

Jesus was angry with the Pharisees because they were consumed by the need to follow the rules; but they had lost heart for what the rules were meant for. The Sabbath is a rule to give us a break from duties, to slow down, and just celebrate God's creation. The rule is meant to serve us, not for us to be servants to the rule.

I think too often we forget to live by the heart of God, rather than by the rules.

When I was a boy I was drawn to the idea that Scripture gives me an unchangeable set of rules to live by; not subject to variation based on the context. But what I have learned through life is that sometimes there are such complicated issues I have to face that I can't just read a rule that applies to my problem. Instead I read:

Ezekiel 36:26 I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

2 Cor 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

So from my New Testament understanding of God, my life shouldn't be run by rules, but from the heart. And not by my human, imperfect, sinful heart, but by the heart of God that lives in me.

I knew in my heart – from the heart of God living in me, that I should ignore my boss and acknowledge the great work that people do. I knew from the heart of God living in me that in our Christian school, we might be the only – or at least the best chance – that a little boy might get to learn to manage his emotional challenges, learn how to interact when things are changing, and know that he is always – loved.

Jesus was grieved over the Pharisees for their hardness of heart.

Making space in ourselves for God's heart to rule – changes our choices.

Living by the guidance of the heart of God opens us up to see miracles happen.

This pours blessings on us, to be all we were meant to be.

May you and I practice and make perfect our ability to see and feel the heart of God living in us. Amen.