

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 3, 2018**

**Mark 2: 23-3:6: *Loving Today, Tomorrow, for a Lifetime and Forever.***

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**A veteran senior angel was giving a brand new freshman angel a tour of the heavens. The freshman angel was wide-eyed and awe-struck as he saw the vastness and majesty and wonder of God's incredible universe. When they came to the Milky Way, the senior angel said to the freshman angel: "Come over here, I want to show you something special. Look down there! That tiny planet is called Earth. It looks rather insignificant from here, doesn't it? It looks so small, so inconsequential, but something quite remarkable happened there some years ago.**

**The people of earth had gotten off the track a bit. They were missing the whole point of their existence. They were missing the meaning of life. So, God sent God's only Son into that world to save them and turn them around and**

**teach them what God meant for them to be like on the Earth.”**

**“Wow! That’s amazing!” said the freshman angel excitedly. “You mean to tell me that God’s Son actually visited that little planet! How pleased the people of Earth must have been to receive Him. I can just imagine that they must have had a great celebration for Him on Earth.”**

**“No,” said the senior angel quietly. Then with tears glistening in his eyes he said, “No, they tried to kill him! They were so rigidly wrapped up in their old ways of doing things that when He presented some new ideas, they resented Him and they tried to silence Him!” Blinded by the old, they missed the new, the Lord God was in that place and they did not know it!**

**How easy it is to fall into this trap! How easy it is to become so paralyzed by our usual ways of doing things that new ways threaten the life out of us. How easy it is to become so closed-minded that we are blind to any kind of new truth! Blinded by the forms, we miss the power of love. Blinded by our rituals, we miss our reason for being. Blinded by our narrowness, we miss God’s nearness. Blinded by the old, we miss the new!**

**We see a vivid example of this in Mark 3. As early as Mark 3, Jesus is already a “marked man.” Is there any doubt in your minds that Jesus is going to be killed? As early as Mark 3, the Pharisees are out to get Him. Already the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests have clashed with Jesus. They are so**

**threatened and frightened by Jesus that they are watching Him just looking for a way to trap Him and trip Him up and do Him in.**

**Now, in the synagogue that day there was a man with a withered hand. His hand was paralyzed. The scriptures suggest that he had not been born that way, but that some illness or injury had taken the strength from him. Other writings tell us that the man was a stone mason and that he came to Jesus for help because his livelihood was in his hands and he didn't want to be a beggar. Now, if Jesus had been a frightened man, He would have looked the other way, or perhaps He knew He was being watched. He knew that if He helped the man He was asking for trouble, big trouble!**

**It was the Sabbath day and all work was forbidden and to heal was to work! So , what are you going to do about this man, Jesus? The people wondered and murmured. The Pharisees watched intently. This was the test. Will He heal this man on the Sabbath? If He does, He will be in trouble with the Law. As often was the case with Jesus, the real question was, "Which is more important, the law or the human being?" So Jesus turned to those gathered around and said, "*Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?*" Don't miss the subtle point here. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were plotting against His life and so He asks, "Is it right to take life or save life!" The onlookers said nothing. Then Jesus said to the man with the**

withered hand, *“Stretch out your hand.”* The man did and he was healed.

The man was healed. The man was made well. The man was made whole. The man could work now. The man could provide for his family. The man could be productive now. The man could have new life now. There was great rejoicing in the synagogue? And they all lived happily ever after? End of story? Not so fast! Not quite! Listen to the last sentence. “The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. They plotted to destroy Him.” He did a great thing and they didn’t rejoice. They sought to destroy Him. So, who were the Herodians? They were the puppet King Herod’s court entourage. Normally the Pharisees would have anything to do with the Herodians, but they were frightened and desperate. My sisters and brothers, fear and desperation are a very dangerous combination. The Pharisees considered them unclean, but now, they were so resentful of Jesus, so jealous that they were prepared to enter into what was for them an unholy/unclean alliance. So the Pharisees plotted with the Herodians against Jesus to destroy Him.

That’s how the story ends. The Pharisees were

- Blinded by their hostility, so they missed the holiness.
- Blinded by their hatred, so they missed the healing.
- Blinded by their duty, so they missed the divinity.

· **Blinded by the old way, so they missed the new way.**

**You see, to the Pharisee, religion was ritual; it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. If you kept the rules, you were good. If you broke the rules, you were bad. Jesus broke their regulations and they were genuinely convinced that He was a trouble-maker and that He needed to be silenced for the good of the community.**

**On the other hand, to Jesus, religion meant service for the betterment of one another, caring for one another, loving one another, helping one another. My sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus, ritual is irrelevant unless it produces love in action. To Jesus, the most important thing in the world was not the correct performance of a ritual, but the spontaneous compassionate answer to the cry of human need. But, we have to admit it. We must confess that often, even today, like the Pharisees, we are so blinded by the old that we miss the new. Let me be more specific. Sometimes blinded by the law, we miss the chance to love. Blinded by Law, we miss the love! That's what happened to the Pharisees that day. They were so alarmed and so upset when they saw Jesus break the Sabbath law that they were totally blinded to the compassionate and wonderfully loving thing that Jesus had done! He helped a man, healed a man, changed his life and they didn't even see it. They were blinded by their rules. They were blinded by their laws. They were blinded by their fear. They**

**were blinded by their desperation. Blinded by the Law... they missed the love! Surely the Lord was in that place and they did not know it.”**

**I read a story just a few years ago that illustrates this point. David Heath’s nine-year-old daughter Jennifer was bitten by a three-foot-long copperhead snake. David Heath and his wife Judy were building a new home on the lake. Late one afternoon as they were inspecting the progress on their new house, they heard their daughter’s screams from the water’s edge where she had been playing. There was no land line phone, no cell phone, so there was no way to call an ambulance. So David and Judy Heath did what you and I would have done. Their 9 year-old daughter had been bitten by a highly poisonous snake. Time was of the essence, so they scooped her up into loving arms, jumped into their car, and made a mad dash to the nearest hospital. With the car’s emergency lights on and flashing, and the horn blasting, they drove frantically through the streets in search of medical help for their daughter. It was a horrifying life or death situation. Finally they arrived at the hospital and rushed into the emergency room where a talented team of doctors and nurses worked with care and precision over the next seven days to save Jennifer’s life. But that day when her dad came out of the emergency room, he was met by a policeman who ticketed him for five traffic violations: speeding, running a red light, running a stop sign, reckless driving, and**

**disturbing the peace. David Heath was put on probation.**

**This true story shows vividly the weakness of legalism. Now please don't misunderstand me. I know that we have to have laws. I'm not criticizing that police officer. He was simply doing his duty as he saw it. I'm simply saying that there are times when human need must transcend the law. There are times when love and understanding and compassion must supersede the law. I'm glad that Jesus was a man of grace and a man of love, rather than a slave to the Law. Sometime blinded by the law, we miss the love.**

**Second, sometimes blinded by common practice we miss the common sense.**

**The Pharisees were so trapped in their usual rigid common ways of doing things that they were blind to the common sense of helping a man in need.**

**We can get so locked into certain ways of doing things, that we fail to consider whether they are right or wrong or whether they make sense. That's what happened to the Pharisees. They had gotten so accustomed to doing things a certain way, that they were not open to any new way, even though it made sense. They couldn't understand the common sense of Jesus in helping this man because their common practice was to not help people on the Sabbath Day. Blinded by the Law, we can miss the chance to love. Blinded by the common practice, we miss the common sense.**

**Finally, blinded by our systems, we miss the savior. We see it graphically in**

**Mark 3. The Son of God walked into their lives and they tried to kill Him. He tried to teach them love and they would not listen. They had their ways, they had their systems, and Jesus was upsetting their applecart. So they plotted against Him.**

**Some years ago when I was serving St. Patrick's Church in Pelham, New Hampshire, one Sunday morning during Sunday School, a ninth-grader pulled the fire alarm. Bells began ringing loudly and in just a few moments, three fire trucks with sirens blaring were there to answer the false alarm. When we asked the ninth-grader why he turned on the fire alarm, he said, "I didn't think it would work!" Isn't that what we say to God? On page after page of the scriptures, God urges us to put love first, to have good will toward all people, to pray for others, to help others, to care for others, to serve others. In Jesus, God shows us that love is the answer, love is the way, love is what God wants but we don't think it will work. We rely on power plays, hostile threats, political strategies, and bureaucratic systems. We plot against one another. We flog one another with cruel words and deadly gossip and then we are oblivious to the harm it causes. We crucify one another trying to get our way. We don't quite trust love yet. We don't think it will work. Well, let me tell you something, Jesus showed us it works on a cross!! Jesus showed us that love, not laws or practices or systems, but it is love that is the most**

**powerful thing in the world. Here is the challenge for the week, live your life in the spirit of love for one day and then do it another day and another day and another day and it will change your life forever. Just try it on. Try it for one day and see how it fits and maybe it will fit you for a lifetime and if love fits you for a lifetime love will fit you for eternity. AMEN.**