

SERMON FOR JUNE 3, 2018

TEXT: MARK 2: 23-28

THEME: WALKING THROUGH THE GRAIN FIELDS

³ One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” ²⁷ And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

In the name of Jesus:

If you are ever going to walk through a field of corn, now is the time to do it! Do it now! Don't wait! If you walk through the cornfield now, the corn has just been freshly planted and the plants are in nice, neat rows. You can literally walk through the field with the plants just coming up out of the ground, so that you can navigate through the field safely and see where you are going. It is easy to walk through a cornfield just right after the seeds have been planted, you can see the whole field, zigzag through crops, and you can navigate safely to the other side.

I made the almost fatal mistake some 20 years ago of walking through a cornfield in the month of August. I will never do that again, it was one of the most harrowing experiences of my life. Our family was visiting my sister and her family in Morton Illinois, just outside of Peoria. I was walking with the four kids and their cousin, Kristen, from my sister's house to where my sister worked. She taught at and still teaches at Bethel Lutheran School in Morton, and either my niece, Kristen, or one of my kids, I

can't remember who it was, came up with the not so bright idea of taking a shortcut from the road that we were on to the school. You see, from where we were walking, we could walk all the way around a big field of corn, whose stalks grew to stand tall over my head, or we could walk THROUGH the cornfield as a short cut. Now, it seemed a great idea at the time, because it would have saved a lot of steps. So I willingly followed Kristen and my four kids as they bounded gleefully into the field of corn seeking that short cut to the other side.

Did I tell you that this was not of the brightest ideas I had ever had in my life? Do you know that I resolved never, EVER, to walk through a cornfield again. Now walking through a corn maze is a different story, at least in a corn maze the path is well laid out in advance, and if you run into a dead end you can turn around and go in a different direction on a different path. But you can't do that when you are walking through a field of corn that is ripe for harvest!

I was fine for the first few rows, but as I got deeper into the field and deeper into the corn, I had no idea where I was going or in what direction I was headed. I just saw the kids in front of me bounding ahead with no fear. But I had fear. First I felt claustrophobic. Then disoriented. Then I thought I was going to die. I thought I was going to die on two accounts. One, I thought that I would never get out of the corn field alive and that the coroner of the country would issue a finding of a pastor dying because he was lost in a corn field and couldn't get out. I could see what the death certificate would say as the cause of death: lost in a cornfield. But then I thought that if I ever got out of the field of corn, that Luann would kill me. Because, you see, when I got half way

in, I couldn't see the kids. Any of them. I could hear their voices but I was so disoriented that I had no idea where they were or if they were even going in the right direction! I could just hear Luann asking: "So, you lost the kids in a corn field?" My death certificate would then read: Cause of death, wife attacking husband for losing kids in a corn field."

You think I am kidding? Those 15-20 minutes of walking through that cornfield were some of the most harrowing minutes of my life. I still get chills just thinking about it!

In our text for today, we read that ³One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain." You can just see the disciples walking into the field and plucking the ripe grain from the stalk." They did so because they were hungry. In the Old Testament times, God told farmers to provide for the poor by leaving a row or two for the poor so that they could pluck grain to satisfy their hunger. The Bible says: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to the edge, you shall leave for the poor and for the sojourner," and: ²⁵If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain." God allowed this so that those in need would have a means to be taken care of. But when the Pharisees saw the disciples doing this, they took Jesus to task, asking Him: "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" They sought to trap Jesus and accuse Him of permitting His disciples to break the Sabbath laws for in plucking the grain they

would be technically working on the Sabbath, this according the strict interpretation of the Law.

But Jesus saw through their faulty logic and being the Master of Logic and Reason, for Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh and all logic and reason is subject to Him said: “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”

Back then, bread for the Tabernacle or Temple would be baked for each Sabbath, so each week 12 new loaves would be baked and set before the Lord. It would be given, as an offering to God and thus God would provide for the needs of the priests through the offering of the bread. The priests would eat the bread dedicated to the Lord. It was how the Lord provided for the priests. This is what Jesus is referring to here; that David and his men ate from the bread that was set aside or dedicated to the priests, and this was permissible because it was a way in which God was providing for them.

Then Jesus concludes by saying this: ““The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” Jesus is teaching the Pharisees, and all who would listen a simple principle. There is a higher standard in keeping the Law, and that is the standard of love.

Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It was never God’s intention to make the children of Israel slaves of the ceremonial or Temple Law, to bind them so that living life would be unpleasant for them. God merely wanted them to be holy, or set

apart, different from the rest of the world. They were to worship God from the heart, out of love. God is concerned more with the condition of the heart than the strict observance of the Law. Just listen to what David writes in Psalm 51: You desire mercy, not sacrifice, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

God does not despise you! Yes, you are a sinner. Your heart and your worship are at times far away from God. There are times when you are more concerned about the strict observance of the ritual of worshipping God than you are loving God from your heart. That was the problem with the Pharisees in our text; they were all about keeping the strict letter of the Law, even if it meant that people who were in need were going to suffer for it. They would rather the disciples go hungry on the Sabbath than having them do the simple task of plucking grain to eat and satisfy their hunger and need.

This is why God sent His Son Jesus, to be your Savior and mine. God created the Sabbath for our blessing, not that we would suffer from it but be blessed by it. Christ came to keep the Law, all of the Law, the Ten Commandments, the Temple Laws, the Church Laws, all of the Law and then offer Himself up as the perfect punishment for our not keeping any of the Law so that we might be free to live a life of love to God and to others. To that end, the Lord Jesus has authority over all Things, and especially over the Sabbath, so that we might be free to live without guilt or punishment from God.

This is why the Bible says that the Son of Man, Jesus, came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many, because we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in

Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

You and I as Christians live under God’s grace. God is a God of love and wants us to rejoice in our salvation in Jesus. So, no matter if you are walking through a corn field and can’t find your way to the other side, or if you are traveling the road of life and it seems as if you don’t know where you are going, know this: that God loves you and that He provides the Way. Listen to His voice in the Word; receive His blessing and strength in the Sacrament. Jesus is the Way, Truth and Life. He will never leave nor forsake you. He loves you and will always love you, and His promise that He will lead and guide you, that even if you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you don’t have to fear, for the Lord Jesus is with you. Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life because of Jesus. So rejoice and be glad, for He will never fail to lead and deliver His own.

Amen