

May 15, 2016

**Beyond Rules**  
*Matthew 11:25-12:8*

Rev. Jan Hazlett

When I was growing up I was not allowed to cross the street by myself.

It was a rule...

There were times that I disliked it and felt it was unfair, because it kept me from doing things I wanted to do and times I crossed because I wanted to

But with 4 sisters getting away with much was difficult....there seemed always to be someone watching.

Especially my older sister who was old enough that she was allowed to cross the road

--She always seemed to pop out from somewhere when I tried to sneak across the road to my best friend's house

Remarkably she would pop out **after** I had crossed, gleefully crowing that I was in trouble...

And she was right, I usually was

My parents made and enforced the rule out of love.

They never intended the rule to test me, or to get me into trouble,

It allowed me freedom to roam the neighbourhood, and boundaries to keep me safe.

Although I didn't understand it fully at the time, this rule actually showed my parents love and care for me.

We had another kind of rule at our house.

Before we ate a meal, we bowed our heads and said grace.

The same grace that my grandsons say today. "God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food, by God's had we all are fed, Give us Lord our daily bread". Amen

This rule was not evenly enforced, this time there was allowance made for those who were younger.

When my little sisters were very hungry, they were allowed to begin eating

We learned to make accommodation for them, even as we learned the importance of waiting for the whole family to be present to say grace together, welcoming God's presence at our table .

Unlike crossing the road, this rule was not about our immediate physical safety,

But rather it was a guide that helped us to recognize the God is indeed great and good

And that God in love and mercy provided for us, the basics like grain and bread...

It was a rule that helped us to know God's love and care for us in all of life,

It was a rule, a ritual meant to help us live in relationship with God and each other.

With these experiences and many others we learned the rules, but also to look beyond the rules,

To understand how to use them in our lives.

The story we read today reminded me of these experiences.

To refresh your memories

Jesus and his disciples were picking grain to eat on the Sabbath.

Like an older sibling the Pharisees always seem to be lurking close by, watching for faults to be committed.

On this day it was no different, the Pharisees popped up and challenged Jesus for allowing his disciples to break fourth commandment

Which was: Thou Shalt keep the Sabbath day holy.

Their reasoning went like this....The Pharisees took God's instructions very seriously.

They knew from Moses that the Sabbath was to be kept as a day of rest, a day free from work

So they understood how important it was to keep from working, so they would not break the rule.

But in order to keep that rule they had to know things like what constitutes working.

So in order to keep the ten commandments

At the time of Jesus the Pharisees had developed interpretations and more rules, actually over 500 of them to follow so they would be following the commandments.

Jesus claimed that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it....

So the conflict was not the validity of the fourth commandment, but **how to live it out**.

The Pharisees focussed to the rules that kept people from inadvertently breaking the Sabbath, such as not harvesting grain....it is obvious that harvesting a crop is work....but is picking food and eating it?

they were so confident in their rules that they became ends in themselves.

Like a vigilant big sister they considered it their ministry to make sure the rules were not broken...

But Jesus was looking not at rules per se but at Gods design and purpose for the world.

God provided the commandments as the best ways to live in relationship with God and other people.

So the Sabbath was not as much about what was forbidden but about living in relationship with God

The Pharisees focused on their way of doing things, but Jesus turned to scripture,

Using examples from the lives of King David, the priests and the prophets,

Pointing them to the intent of the Sabbath, that is to enjoy God and all God provides

Much like a family grace, it was a way to help people to live in relationship with God

And to live in relationship with others.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of not understanding God and God's love for people.

Reminiscent of my big sister's use of the rules to get me in trouble,

the Pharisees were using the guidelines in a way God never intended –that is to judge others and find them wanting....as if the rules were there just to find fault.

By using scripture and law in this way, they were dishonouring God.

and putting greater burdens on people than they were meant to carry.

Rather than help people to live in relationship with God and others, The Pharisees were using the law as a barrier to living in relationship with God and breaking relationship with others....

Jesus taught that the law was to help people recognize God's love and grace for them to extend God's grace, loving kindness, love to others and should be interpreted and used that way.

Jesus claimed his authority from God to interpret scripture trumps the Pharisees authority of tradition.

So what does this have to do with us today, on this Pentecost Sunday?

Pentecost is about the work of the Holy Spirit whether in showy or subtle ways,

The work of the Spirit in and among us and in the world,

About God reaching out to all people, all nations under heaven.

Just as Jesus claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath, and authority to reinterpret

The early church were given the authority to interpret and reinterpret scripture,

in the light of God's revelation in Jesus and under the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit has been poured out on us as well.

I cannot for a moment believe that Jesus teaching for us to see how wrong the Pharisees were....and condemn them.

But for us to see the truth that at times we are more like the Pharisees than we choose to admit. We come with our own history and baggage, our understanding of the way to live as Christians, The ways we have developed and depended on in our lives of faith.

At times we are the big sister, using our power,

At times we try to justify our own behaviour and at others measure others with our own measuring stick rather than in light of God's grace.

Perhaps used a statement like "we don't do it that way" or "that way doesn't work any more"

It may be in judged others by their actions and yourself by your intentions.....

We have misinterpreted rules to our own advantage and broken relationship with God and others.

But we have the power of the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead...

With God's Spirit we have the power to change—to turn around and see the truth.

God provides for us, guidelines for living, companions for the journey,

Communities of faith where God speaks to us, teaches and forms us as we interact and live in relationship.

Just as we see God's provision of our daily bread as evidence of God's presence, so when we share bread, others have evidence of God's love and grace extending to them.

This month as a community, we are working together to share what God has freely given to us.

In particular to contribute to the food bank. With the need of refugees, of evacuees from Fort Mac, the needs of those affected by the economic downturn....

the need is great... But I know that God's love is greater.....

Just as Jesus vision of the kingdom shaped what Jesus did and taught,

The rules are there to help us to live in relationship with God and with others....not to help us judge others

Let's use them as they were always intended so wherever we go, in our words, attitudes and actions

People will be able to say, surely God is in this place

Amen