

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus asks this question specifically to the Pharisees after they trot out some poor, unsuspecting sap with a painful, disfiguring disease, using him as nothing more than a pawn they can use to try and catch Jesus in a sin. It’s an easy-enough, straight-forward question that Jesus asks, and we all know how it all turned out. Those self-righteous, works-righteous Pharisees, so caught up in following all the rules and trying to earn their salvation by doing all the right things and avoiding all the wrong things, they’re the ones who needed to learn the simplicity of true right and wrong.

My dear fellow Pharisees (and I do include myself in there too): Is it really that simple? “Is it lawful...?” Said another way, we would ask, “Is it right/wrong? Is it permissible? Is it okay?” Simple enough, right? Not really. The full weight and thrust of Jesus’ question becomes very apparent when you come at it in the original Greek. You see, Jesus doesn’t simply ask if it’s right or wrong/legal or illegal to heal on the Sabbath. Our English translation doesn’t adequately capture what Christ is driving at.

The word we translate as “lawful” (exestin) carries with it a meaning that goes far beyond the simple right and wrong, good and bad, black-and-white, obeying the rules kind of meaning we assign to it. This word is a cognate—a form—of the word exousia, which is the word for “authority.” Does one have the authority to heal on the Sabbath?” Now...that may not seem like much of a difference in meaning to you; six one way and half-a-dozen the other way. But...there is a difference in meaning and understanding, and the difference is HUGE! Think about it: The One who created the Sabbath; the One who alone is the

Author of the Sabbath, asks His creation whether or not it's authorized to do something as miraculous and life-saving as healing on the Sabbath day. The Author asks about authority!

Folks: This is a question that we, too, need to be confronted with in our own lives! Now, I don't think there's one of us here who is foolish enough to honestly believe that our following all the rules and doing all the right things and avoiding all the bad things somehow earns us or merits us God's grace and favor. Works-righteousness isn't really a problem with us, is it? And yet...how often do we fall into the sin of transgressing the authority of God? How often do we hold ourselves up as the final arbiters of Truth and Justice and Wisdom, even if our version of Truth, Justice, and Wisdom stands in opposition to God's Truth, Justice, and Wisdom?

And this brings up a very interesting and important point regarding the Pharisees. It's often believed that the Pharisees were highly works-righteous, foolishly working so hard to keep all God's rules and commands in order to earn themselves the best spots in God's kingdom. That much is true, but their problem wasn't really grounded in works-righteousness. This was just one symptom of the deadly and sinful disease infecting those Pharisees; the first sin; the first and deadly and sinful disease known as “pride.”

At this point you're probably thinking that I got my sermon notes mixed up. It's easy to see how pride is the problem in the second half of the Gospel lesson, where Jesus teaches explicitly about pride and humility, telling those selfish glory-hounds that when they go to something special like a feast or a fancy dinner party, they should seek out the lowest, most anonymous, least celebrated position. They should make themselves the lowest of the low and rush for the bottom spot of honor rather than making a mad dash to get the best seat, the

most camera time, the most fame and notoriety, etc. A lesson on pride and humility makes perfect sense there...but it doesn't seem to fit in the first lesson; that lesson on the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath.

Remember: We just got done saying that Jesus wasn't simply asking whether or not it's right or wrong to heal on the Sabbath. He was asking about the authority to heal on the Sabbath, which is something that God alone possessed. The issues of pride and humility that are so explicitly addressed in the second part of the Gospel reading flow forth from Jesus' original question regarding authority. As I said before, we do tend to over-step our authority when it comes to God's Word, God's ways, and God's will. And if you don't believe that this same kind of over-stepping of divine authority is true of your own life, take a good honest look in the mirror. Ask yourself the simple question of whether or not you humble yourself and lower yourself to God's Word, will, and ways. We all know that God works all things for the good of those who love Him. We all know that God works through crosses to make His good and gracious ways known to men. We all know it...and yet how often do we do our best to avoid those crosses? How often do we actually doubt God and His Wisdom because we get a lowly cross rather than the glory and honor that we think we deserve? Deserve...? That's an authority issue. What do you deserve, o sinner? What rights do you have before God, o sinner?

But you, o child of God, seek first the kingdom of God. Store up your treasures in heaven, where rust and moth do not destroy. All glory, praise, and honor be to God, the Giver and Provider of all that you have and all that you are. Be not anxious or upset or angry, for your Father knows all these things. The Author of your life knows what you need and what's going on. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without Him knowing. Of how much greater value are you? He knows how you struggle. He knows when NOBODY else knows or cares. He

knows how you quietly, faithfully, and anonymously bear your crosses and live out your life of faith. He knows, and He is pleased. “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest I have prepared for you.”

My friends: It’s not about us. It’s not about me. It’s about Christ. It’s all about Him and His great and unconditional love for us and for all mankind...even those who hate Him and despise Him and think they know better than Him. Taking us back to the first question regarding the authority to heal on the Sabbath, look no further than right here, right now. Folks: This is what it’s all about! This is what it’s always been all about. This is why Church exists! This is why we still observe Sabbath rest. Enter into this rest that the Author has prepared for you! None of this here is our gift or favor to God. God Himself tells us that we bring nothing to Him except the sacrifice of thanksgiving for all that He has done for us. God calls us today to enter into His rest; to take time out of the busy-ness and weariness that naturally comes with bearing our crosses and being faithful in the midst of a fallen and sinful world, to come to Him and be fed and nourished and filled up and replenished...and healed with overflowing grace, mercy, and peace that ONLY the Author can give.

Jesus wasn’t seeking glory or praise or accolades. He didn’t even have a grave to call His own. It wasn’t about Him. It was about you. He was seeking you, going into the belly of sin and death to find you and call you by name, carrying you out on His shoulders, carrying you into the Light and Life that is known only in Him and proceeds only from Him.

My fellow redeemed; redeemed by God Himself: May these unmerited gifts of God Himself, to you and for you; may this singular authoritative Truth of God Himself, be and remain with you, in you, and

“Pride and Authority” Luke 14:1-11 Trinity 17 2021

flow forth from you, now and into all eternity. May this ever and always be what you’re all about.

To Christ alone be all glory, all praise, and all honor. AMEN