

If you were with us last week, or if you read the homily on the parish website, you will recall that the key line in the passage from Matthew 3 was *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets I have come not to abolish but to fulfill*. In that key passage the key word is *fulfill*. This evening's passage from John's Gospel is a wonderful example of what *fulfill* meant to Jesus. I pointed out last week that all but one of the 10 commandments are couched in terms of thou shall not. Jesus when asked what is the greatest commandment replied in Matthew 22: *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* *This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* As I said last week for Jesus fulfilling the commandments is to set the primacy of love.

True, Exodus does say, *But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work*. But the first and second commandment take precedence. The man who had been ill for 38 years who could not make his way to the healing pool is a neighbour in need of an act of love only Jesus can provide. The sabbath was meant as gift to humankind, a time of healing and mercy, when the labour exacted for six days was often hard and even brutal. The sabbath among other things was meant as a time of relief from burdens and suffering not as an excuse to prolong suffering.

There are, of course, similar passages throughout the Gospels of Jesus in trouble with the Pharisees or the chief priests and the scribes either because of something he has done on the Sabbath or his disciples had done. Perhaps the best know one is in Luke 13: *Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"* Again Jesus performs an act of love, mercy, and liberation and is roundly criticized for doing good on the Sabbath.

A 14th century French proverb *bon jour, bon oeuvre* became in English better the day, better the deed. Ironically it appeared in a book of Scottish Proverbs in 1721. Ironically, because parts of Scotland became the home of the strictest Sabbatarianism in Christendom rivalling the Pharisees in mindless obedience to a rule without regard to compassion, and let it be said without regard to love.

We none of us should be cavalier about our activities on Sunday. *Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.* Could there be anything more holy than healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or freeing the oppressed. Harkening back to the firstst and greatest commandment and the second like unto it, if an action is motivated by love towards God and neighbour can there be anything more holy. Think of what a better world it would be if everyone before applying rules or power to any situation were to ask what would the loving God do?

I want to say something of John's Gospel that I said before, but I think it useful to reinforce the point whenever possible. Many of us find John's Gospel difficult because of the frequency and force he employs to cast the Jews in a bad light. It is also undeniable that for two millennia John's Gospel has been used as ammunition by antisemites inflicting horrific violence against the children of Abraham. There are two reasons for John's position on the Jews. John was writing no earlier than 90 of the Common Era and possibly as many as 30 years later. In 88 of the Common Era the followers of Jesus were expelled from the synagogues. After the destruction of the Temple in 70, Judaism was in crisis from which it was extricated by the Pharisees who moved it to becoming fully based in the synagogue with strict focus on the law and prophets which left no latitude for a sect equally faithful to the law and prophets but also faithful to Jesus the Christ. This fragile community was struggling to find its own way. In addition the followers of Jesus were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. Between 66 and 136 there were successive rebellions by the Jews in Palestine against Rome. Even as the Christians were reeling from their expulsion from the synagogue, they needed to develop a separate identity that did not couple them to the rebels in order to escape persecution by Rome. Hence the language right after our passage this evening. *Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus because he was doing such things on the sabbath.* John's Gospel was not hateful, alas the same cannot be said for those who have used his work as an excuse for hate.

There is another lesson in this passage which has nothing to do with the day of the week the healing was achieved. Jesus asks the sick man, *Do you want to be made well?* Does he respond with, oh, yes please? No, he makes excuses, I have no one to carry me, someone always butts in. How often our response to a call is, I'm not sure; its not a good time; what if it doesn't work out? We often become trapped in the what we know, even if it is affliction. How much more often do we say, "It could be worse" rather than "I want it to be better"? If we hear the voice calling in the night, whom shall I send? Do we reply, "Here I am Lord send me, Lord. Or do we reply, "Joe or Mary" might be available, perhaps others would be better? Oh I wouldn't be good at that. Like the sick man at the pool, excuses are always available. Avoiding change is the most futile act that we can commit. Change will happen. All that attempting to avoid it ensures is that we deprive ourselves of any agency in the nature and the consequences of that change. Had Jesus not intervened that sick man could have there for 38 more years still saying, "I have no one to carry me." "Someone always butts in." Faith builds trust in God. Trust in God builds confidence in self. More often than not the opposite of faith is not unbelief, it is dithering indecision. Amen