

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 12

Matthew 12:1–14

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. ² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

³ He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

⁹ Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

¹¹ He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Reflection

We have seen how the presence of the kingdom has been disruptive in many ways. But, how far does that go? Matthew turns the page to the next block of narrative, now centred around the question “is it lawful?” This is an important question for the Pharisees because they believed that if Israel would truly keep the Law for even one day then God would restore his people. Therefore, those who were blatantly transgressing the Law were dangerous and had to be dealt with.

Matthew begins with Pharisees who hangout in grain fields; something they didn’t usually spend time on. Clearly they are keeping an eye on Jesus. Its debatable if the disciples plucking a few grains off the stalks, rubbing them in their hands to separate wheat from chaff, and eating them would constitute work. But, the Pharisees would rather err on the side of caution. So, they challenge. Once again Jesus tells them who he is.

When David and his friends went in and eat the show bread, he had been anointed king, but was on the run from Saul who was still king. Who is Jesus? He is the one who has been anointed king, even though it doesn’t look like it. What is the nature of the Temple and Priest? The mediated presence between God and Israel (the world). There is now a fuller mediator. Jesus has not transgressed the Law he is fulfilling it.

Matthew continues with a story about healing. Is it Lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Jesus demonstrates how they already have answered their own question. You rescue sheep on the Sabbath because they are valuable and contribute to God’s blessing. If a person is greater than a sheep with more worth (made in God’s image), then of course they too should be rescued. Especially on the Sabbath in the context of worship.

We are reminded how dangerous religion can become when it loses a sense of God’s mission. True worship is mercy, not sacrifice. That’s why Lent isn’t just about giving something up (sacrifice). Instead it is about entering God’s kingdom and extending it to the marginalized (mercy).

Prayer

Lord, forgive us for the times that we have been more concerned with remaining pure and have missed opportunities to invite the poor into your life. Amen.