

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who shows us how to live out the spirit and intent of the Law, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

A couple of years ago PJ gave me a beautiful Alpaca Wool sweater for Christmas. It's black and sort of a loose weave. I've only worn it once. The problem isn't how soft it is. It feels absolutely wonderful. PJs working today so I'm going to let you in on a secret... There are really two problems with that gift. First, I know it must have been expensive, so am afraid to wear it and second, it doesn't fit quite right. It's like most handmade sweaters, a little too wide in some spots and a little too snug in others. So, the sweater sits on a shelf in my closet. I treasure it because she gave it to me in love, but I don't get much use out of it.

It's a shame when we allow gifts to go unused or possibly even worse yet to be misused. In today's Gospel reading from Luke, we have two Sabbath controversy stories. The main point of these stories is that the Religious leaders have been misusing the god given gift of Sabbath. God gave the Hebrew people the Gift of the Sabbath along with the other nine Commandments during a time when they were wandering in the wilderness. God had freed them from slavery in Egypt and through his servant Moses, God was forming them into a single cohesive Nation. In Egypt, the Hebrew people had no freedom. They worked when their masters demanded, they ate only what they were given, and they slept

only when allowed to do so. They had no idea how to govern themselves, let alone how to be God's Chosen People. So, in God's infinite mercy, he delivers the Ten Commandments, including the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it Holy. The religious leaders, including some of the scribes and the Pharisees took these Ten Commandments and turned them into over 613 laws and ordinances for all the people to live by. They had turned God's good gift of ten simple laws to live by into an onerous legal system with an exception to every rule, when it suited their own purposes.

So, along comes Jesus, the very Word of God incarnate, the one who knows the mind of God, because He is God, and this Jesus of Nazareth decides the time had come to show these self proclaimed religious leaders and us the true spirit and intent behind the law. In today's reading Jesus, that radical Jesus who always seems to want to change everything, shows the religious leaders and us a thing or two about the meaning of the Sabbath and who has the authority to interpret this commandment and every other one as well. Power, and authority to wield it, is what is at stake. Make no mistake about it. When Jesus allows his disciples to pick grain, thrash it in the palm of their hands and eat it, he was declaring his authority as being even over the Hebrew people's greatest king, David. In the following Sabbath controversy over the healing of the man with the withered hand, it's as if Jesus goes out of his way to heal the man on the Sabbath. This man must

have been known to the scribes and Pharisees because the text says they watched him to see what Jesus would do. He must have had that withered hand before coming into the synagogue, but Jesus waited until he was in the middle of the Worship service to publicly call the man out and heal him right there in front of everyone. Jesus wanted to throw out the old traditions and show the people God's heart of love. In the first story regarding working on the Sabbath, Jesus insults the leaders when he asked them, "Have you never read the Bible?" In the second controversy, His question about doing good or evil on the Sabbath also raised the hair on the back of their heads. These men considered themselves to be the one and only experts in the law. But the times they are a changing, as Bob Dylan wrote back in the 60s.

The times are a changing again for us now. One thing this Corona Pandemic has taught us is there are more ways to worship than we ever thought or ever would have dreamed of before we were forced to look outside the box this past year. I remember when some of you interviewed me over 7 years ago, before asking me to be your interim pastor. One of the topics we discussed was using technology such as websites and other gadgets like cameras to record services. The distinct impression I got was that you considered Trinity to be a small church and didn't see much of an advantage in spending our budget dollars on high tech. I think that feeling is genuine, and I like being part of a small country church.

This past year caused us to look at how we can stay connected to God and to one another when our old traditional ways to worship were taken away. A year ago, none of us would have predicted we would have more than 100 views on FaceBook and even more on YouTube. We're reaching out to our neighbors in totally new ways than we ever imagined. We're even looking into permanent cameras that can broadcast our FaceBook Live services and also record significant events in the lives of our Church Family like weddings, Baptisms, and confirmations. I don't believe God caused this Pandemic, but we've become innovative and discovered new ways to be Church together.

I wonder what other traditions we need to examine in light of the spirit and intent of God's law and God's will for our little country Church... We already took one huge step in changing to the Narrative Lectionary. We went from 4 scripture readings down to one reading and that reading moves through the books of the Bible in a more logical, consistent way. That one change also resulted in reading some parts of the Bible that never came up in the other lectionary we were using. My point here is that when we make significant changes in our worship traditions we try to do it so that we make the best use of all the gifts God has given to us.

Come to think of it, I believe I'll pull that Alpaca sweater out of the closet and try it on one more time because it's really a shame to have good gifts and not

use them... May we always listen to Jesus and remember that all of the laws and ordinances in the Bible are subject to His interpretation. The Sabbath was made for humans not the other way around, may we keep the Sabbath Holy in our worship and in our good works giving glory to our Father in Heaven. May we keep our eyes open for ways in which our man-made traditions hold us back from living out the spirit and intent of God's will for us. May Jesus continually send his spirit to us as we try to be God's hands, feet, and mouth here in this time and this place. Glory be to God, amen.