



# GOOD SHEPHERD

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### Dinner Lessons: Help is Hospitality

Luke 14:1-6; Matthew 12:1-2,7

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June 3, 2018

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*There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.' What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?*

*"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, "Go and do the same." (Luke 10:30-37, THE MESSAGE)*

This is one of the better-known stories Jesus told. Jesus told it to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" But it also describes a tension between religious responsibilities. The religious men were on their way, no doubt, to some religious place or function, perhaps even something required by God's Law. What does God desire?

Well, I'm not preaching on that story this morning, but it's the same tension and the same topic that comes up in today's text. Jesus is at the house of one of the leading religious people of his day. He's there on the Sabbath to eat with the religious leaders and is faced with the same situation in his story. Does he follow

the “religious rules” or go against them when he encounters a man in need of help? Add to that that Jesus said of himself that he did not come to do away with God’s Law, but to fulfill it. So what does God desire?

Today we are beginning a summer-long series inspired by our recent anniversary lunch and open house. I was working with Mark Katibah on the flyer for the event and trying to think of a theme. I saw his wording about HAVING and open house for the neighborhood and I thought, “What God wants is for us to BE and open house to our neighbors.” So that’s our theme for this summer series. I want to look at a number of encounters with Jesus – many around themes of hospitality and welcome – and see what it means for us to be an “open house church.”

### **Sunday Lunch (vv.1-3)**

When I was growing up, Sunday lunch was a big deal. I suppose it still is for some church-going folks, though it may be more likely to be out at a restaurant than gathered around a table at home. But when I was young it was pretty inviolate. If you wanted to go over to a friend’s house, it was well after Sunday lunch. It was like an extension of worship and a part of family tradition and you didn’t mess with it.

That’s a flavor of what’s going on in Luke 14. It is a Jewish context, so it’s the Sabbath meal rather than our Sunday. But it’s a meal tied to weekly worship and observance of God’s commandments. It was also the perfect place for the religious leaders to test Jesus, because a number of the religious laws came into focus at the Sabbath meal. The gist of the Sabbath was that God set the pattern of resting on the seventh day after creating on the first six. And like His creative work, God’s rest was also good. Then God gave Moses the Ten Commandments which included “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8) Then, to underscore that, there were a number of specific commandments about resting from work on the Sabbath. It was not just a “take it easy” command, but “on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord.” (Exodus 31:15) Keeping that Sabbath commandment was a sign of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, so it was a big deal.

This particular meal in Luke 14 was no random social occurrence either. This was a setup and a test. Verses 1-3 describe who all is at the meal. There are 'lawyers' or scribes. These were not attorneys, but experts in the Jewish religious laws – that is, the Mosaic Law and all the interpretation of it. The Pharisees were a religious/political party intent on putting the scribes interpretation of the Law into practice. And the leader of the Pharisees hosting the party was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish judicial council, also a religious and political position of power. And finally, there was a sick man suffering with dropsy (sometimes now called edema), which we think was a disease in which fluid collected in parts of the body. It seems very unlikely that he wandered in or would be allowed to wander in. It seems evident that he was brought in specifically to see how Jesus would respond, much as in another Gospel when the scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery before Jesus to see how he will interpret the religious Law.

In fact, Jesus had previously healed people twice on the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11 and 13:10-17), so this seems like a specific test and trap, designed to get Jesus in trouble or even bring charges against him as not just teaching against, but breaking the Law of Moses and violating the Hebrew scriptures.

### **The Test (vv.3-6)**

So, Jesus had taken heat twice before for healing on the Sabbath and now he was faced with it again, with a room full of scribes and Pharisees in front of him in the home of one of the judges of Israel. What would you do? Remember too, that Jesus taught and believed that he didn't come to do away with the Mosaic Law, but to fulfill it. The Law and the Sabbath Law was not bad, so he had no desire to thumb his nose at it. But there was also a man in need.

First he asked all those experts and devotees of the Law: What do you say? "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" (v.3) That's a bit of turning the tables... will they take the same test they are trying to put him through? No... they kept silent. (v.4) Now, Jesus could have also chosen to keep silent or not act, but he would not ignore the man in need.

As they stood silent, he took hold of the man and healed him, and sent him away. (v.4) That's all the detail we get, but it's all we need. No stalling or "meet me later" or "on another day."

Then he spoke again to the room full of experts and devotees of the Law: "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" (v.5) And they could make no reply to that either, for saving a life (for human or animal) was allowed in the Law and they knew they would do the same. In effect, Jesus claimed that this diseased man as worth of the same attention. In doing so he also demonstrated his intimate knowledge of the Mosaic Law and how he was interpreting it.

Now you may be thinking, "Where in the world does it say in the Old Testament that you can't help a sick person on the Sabbath?" Well, it doesn't! But centuries of interpretation of the Sabbath commandment had led to a long list of do's and don'ts (mostly don'ts) about what could happen on the Sabbath. But again, Jesus didn't just thumb his nose at the Mosaic Law, but demonstrated how well he knew it AND was keeping it: namely, that God is a God of compassion, mercy, and healing, and rest from work was not the same as rest from compassion and mercy.

### **What Does God Desire? (Matthew 12:7)**

So what DOES God desire? In another situation of supposedly breaking the Sabbath, Jesus is challenged for his disciples picking some grain from a field to eat on the Sabbath. But they weren't harvesting (work); they were hungry and just having a bit of extra grain (also provided for in God's Law for the hungry!). In that instance, Jesus quotes scripture to the Pharisees; this was the other text you heard this morning, from Matthew 12:7, which was quoting Hosea from the Old Testament – "For I desire compassion and not a sacrifice." There and at this meal in Luke 14 Jesus is reminding them that God desires mercy and compassion all the time, for that is one of God's defining and holy characteristics.

So, while we are to rest from working 24/7, it is for our well-being and ordering of human life; it is not to neglect human need, worship of God, or any other number of things. Doing so is an example of legalism. Legalism is appealing because we don't have to think or evaluate or weigh our actions. Legalism can also be

appealing because we can hide behind it. Think about that parable of the Good Samaritan again. The two religious people that passed on by might well have said, "But I can't be late; I am on my way to do the Lord's work." But they were missing the Lord's work right in front of them and may have been using a legalism to avoid helping a hurt Samaritan, a person they had no affinity with and even despised for cultural and religious reasons.

Jesus spends a significant part of his ministry teaching and demonstrating what God desires. In his "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-8, he teaches directly about God's Laws. That's where he says he doesn't come to do away with them, but to explain and fulfill them. So, he says God isn't looking for external conformity, but inward understanding. It's not enough to not kill, we must also endeavor to love and forgive neighbor and even enemies.

So what about for us? Do we ever use religious practice in a way that misses God's intent for us? I think the answer is a resounding yes.

Sometimes we get it right: I think of the event that inspired this whole summer series. We were queued up to have another anniversary celebration of our church's founding... a meal, in fact. And there is nothing sinful or wrong about that. In fact, it's great! Let's eat, enjoy each other, and celebrate what God has done and is doing here at Good Shepherd. But what of the 10,000 people who live within a mile of our church, many hurting, lonely, and without connection to the community of God? When someone suggested reaching out and inviting the neighbors to our special meal we could have said, "No, this is just for members; we can do something for them another time." But that members-only perspective is a misreading and misapplication of scripture and God's intent for His people. Even with ancient Israel, God's covenant people to whom God appeared and revealed His Law, it was always for the sake of the world. They were blessed in order to be a blessing. And then in the New Testament, there is no missing the call to the church out into the world. And thankfully, we knew that and folks poured themselves into inviting and opening up and welcoming even when it meant some extra logistics and considerations.

Other times, like with our politics or finances or Facebook posts I think we can justify attitudes and behaviors as somehow rooted in our faith, but let ourselves

off the hook of digging deeply into God's character and desire for us to be engaged with the world around us. That's the kind of thing we are going to dig into this summer, so I'll leave up a question to take with you here at the beginning of the series:

***How do I appeal to faith or religion that may miss  
God's intent for me as His child and follower?***

### **Dinner Continues...**

This was not the end of the dinner or Jesus' exchange with those at the dinner. In fact, after he heals the man and there is no response to his questions, he launches into three parables or stories in a row, each using imagery from a dinner party and immediately applicable to those present. I imagine by the end they were probably regretting their attempt to trap Jesus!

Over the next three weeks we will look at each of those parables as a "dinner lesson" from Jesus to us as we seek to grow in our understanding and capacity to show godly hospitality and help towards those outside our walls. Amen.