

## **Exception**

Interpretation: Part 2 “Exception”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 17, 2022

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** 1 Samuel 21:1-6; Colossians 2:13-17; Matthew 12:1-8

**Reflection:** Psalm 130

**Greeting:** The Lord has told us what is good and right. The Lord requires of us that we are to do justice. The Lord our God calls us to love kindness. We are to walk humbly with our God! Praise the Lord! (*Micah 6:8*)

**Prayer:** O God, our Guide and Guardian, you have led us away from the stress and the strain of the world to be in your peaceful presence. Grant us grace to worship you in Spirit and in truth. May we find comfort in your love and may you build us up by your faith. Enable us to do the work that you have called us to, without fear of failure or hesitation to do good. May we worship you, not just with our lips this hour, but in word and deed all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 130

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.!* (Psalm 130 NRSVue\*)

We read the words of Psalm 130 and hear of God’s forgiveness. That the love of the Lord is great. That God is our hope and our deliverance. We know that when we reach out to the Lord that we will be heard. How do you wait for the Lord? In what ways do you celebrate God’s steadfast love? How do you share that love with others? How do you praise God? Do you sing of God’s praises so that others may know the Lord? How do we celebrate God together?

**Prayer:** O God, you are our hope and our praise. Help us to seek your wisdom in all that we are and do. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 1 Samuel chapter 21 verses 1 through 6.

*David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" David said to the priest Ahimelech, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'No one must know anything of the matter about which I send you and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever is here." The priest answered David, "I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread—provided that the young men have kept themselves from women." David answered the priest, "Indeed, women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?" So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.*

*(1 Samuel 21:1-6 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from Colossians chapter 2 verses 13 through 17.

*And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food or drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ.*

*(Colossians 2:13-17 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading for today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 12 verses 1 through 8.

*At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? How he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8 NRSVue\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today we have an interesting look at an exception to the rules. In our Gospel account, the Pharisees see Jesus and his disciples plucking heads of grain from a field and eating them. The Pharisees tell them that they're doing what it's not lawful to do on the Sabbath. And to make sure that everyone knows exactly what they're talking about, it's not the fact that they are just wandering through a field picking heads of grain. That's actually a thing that is specifically allowed under the law. However, the Pharisees see this as doing work on the Sabbath, which is not allowed. Jesus in turn asks them if they remember what David did when he and his companions were hungry. What did David do? We see that in our reading from First Samuel. David and his men are hungry, so David stops to seek food from the priest Ahimelech. David asked for whatever they have on hand. The only thing they do have on hand is the bread of the presence, holy bread. So, the priest gives him the bread of the presence. Normally, it's only meant to be eaten by the priests in the holy place, but David was in need, so he takes the bread. Jesus references this because he's noting that David was hungry and in need and so he was given bread that he shouldn't have been given. Jesus also notes that the priests have to work on the Sabbath consistently, yet they're guiltless. We hear an echo of this in Colossians. That Jesus disarmed those in charge so that no one should condemn you in matters of food or drink or observing Sabbath's, because they are only a shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ. Which reminds us again that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

That phrasing could be taken in a few different ways, but one of the things that it highlights is also mentioned in the other Gospel accounts of this interaction. That man was not made for the Sabbath but that the Sabbath was made for man. That the Sabbath is a benefit for humankind and isn't meant to be a hindrance. That the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath reminds us of this simple truth. If the Sabbath is made for the benefit of people, it means that we need this exception. The reason I note the exception is that the rule isn't just thrown out. However, the question raised is about interpretation. Why interpret the law in a way that harms people? Because if people are hungry, they must eat. Why would you condemn them to starve just because it's the Sabbath? How does that honor God? That becomes one of the big focal points in this entire matter. And it raises a rather good question. If our entire point is that the Sabbath is there so that we do honor God, then we have to ask if there is a point to the Sabbath if it does not honor God. And if it does not, maybe we should be rethinking things. And that's part of what we get in our reading today. The problem is with the way the law is being interpreted by the Pharisees. The law has become a tool to keep people in line instead of helping them to live a life devoted to God. The interpretation being presented is one that is punitive. The Pharisees are not thinking about the people but of their own position. They want to be the ones that interpret the law and enforce it because of power. Not in order to help people grow closer to God. They don't look at it as a way to honor God but as a way to bring themselves honor. They aren't considering whether or not this is the right thing to do, but simply that they know what the law says and they're going to hold on to it no matter what.

The idea that Christ puts forward is that the exception must be there to care for people. Jesus points out the case of an exception to the rules made for David. He points out the story of the beloved and well-respected David because it would be a well-known example of an exception. If David was allowed to take the show bread, the bread of the presence, then we have to consider why an exception was made. Normally only the priests could eat this bread, but David is allowed to take it because he and his men need food. In order to do good and help someone in need, an exception is made. It isn't the rules that are of utmost importance, but it is the people involved that matter the most. David needed to eat, so he was fed. In the same way, when Jesus and his followers are going through the field and plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath, the uproar is that they're working on the Sabbath. Nowhere do we see an offer to feed them so that they don't have to work on the Sabbath. There is no invitation from the Pharisees to feed the hungry people. They aren't interested in solving the problem. They are interested in complaining that somebody isn't following the law as they have interpreted it. Because they want people to do things the way that they think they should be done. And this is problematic because it means that at the core of their interpretation is not what's best for God, not what's best for man, but simply interpreting the rules to interpret the rules. Nothing in what they're doing honors God and nothing in what they are doing helps people out. So, when Jesus points out that people are more important, he's stating something that is actually baked into the idea of the Sabbath. The problem with not thinking about people when interpreting Sabbath law is that you can very quickly come up with rules that are simply there to make life harder. They don't do anything to help people grow with God. It does nothing to help make sure that people are helped by the rules. It very quickly becomes about enforcing rules for the sake of enforcing rules and it easily slips into keeping others down rather than enhancing their lives. And everything that's done to honor God should be doing something to help people. It may not always be easy, but it should always be something that will help them grow. But how was denying somebody food helping them grow? How was denying somebody the basics they need to live going to help them in their devotion to God? We can see very easily that part of the problem here is that we have a disconnect. The reason Christ notes the exception to the rule is because if there are no exceptions the rule becomes useless. If there are not exceptions for the sake of grace and mercy, then the rule will be abused, and it will not honor God.

One of the things I wanted to note with all of this is that the reason that we see Jesus defend this action and reference David is so that the Sabbath can't be used as a weapon. Because using the Sabbath and any of the laws as a weapon in order to keep people down and to keep them from the most basic of necessities is not keeping in God's steadfast love. Because it means that we're no longer thinking about God's will or God's plans or God's love, but we are simply thinking about the way that we can wield rules to harm others. The path that Christ offers us in noting this exception is that there's a better way forward by always keeping God's steadfast love in mind and in our hearts. That we always are thinking about God's grace and God's mercy in whatever it is we're doing, even as we interpret the law. That we know that there are exceptions, because life is full of circumstances that will require our mercy and love.

That we may come into situations that are outside the simplest view of what is right and what is wrong. And in those cases, we must think about God's love and what will help people. People are always going to be more important than simply adhering to the letter of the law. Helping someone is always going to be above simply keeping the law for the law's sake. Because only one of those instances has God in mind. Only one of those instances honors what God truly wants for his people. So let us be a people that always seek to honor God with our actions. That even if we need an exception to the rule, if the exception is out of love, then even in the exception we honor and serve the Lord with all that we are and all that we have, that all may know God's blessing. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Interpretation**

Our current series will be looking at the ways that we interpret Scripture. Each week will be a different lesson that will look at the Old and New Testament and what we learn about them both through Christ.

### **Prayer List**

|   |                    |                  |                            |
|---|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Rev Charliam Renner                         | Bishop Frank Beard | Our Conference   | Our Healthcare Workers     |
| Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew |                    | Eric Veach       | Ed & Verna Titus           |
| Henry Catey                                 | Jake Kiser         | Cindy Cisney     | Nancy Hoke                 |
| Family of Don Wells                         | Tricia Adkins      | Don Stewart      | Ronnie Winstead            |
| Dwight Parsons                              | Lauren Stewart     | Phyllis Gabel    | Sage Martin                |
| Dalton McFarland                            | Ruth Ann Finley    | Jodie Bunch      | Tom Finley                 |
| Laura Carlen                                | Rosie Chancellor   | Susie Callahan   | Kenny Holmes               |
| Chuck Hogan                                 | Brittany Gilbert   | Jackie Potter    | Don Holsapple              |
| Family of Loise Roberts                     | Jeremy Klinger     | Phil Hawickhorst |                            |
| Richard Durham                              | Kathy Hanks        | Wayne Carrell    | Gary & Mary Winterrowd     |
| Leo Smith                                   | Sue & Bob Smyser   | Larry Thompson   | Nick & Leana Ochoa         |
| Family of Bunny Sparks                      | Greg Williams      | Martha Roberts   | Charlie & Charlotte Baxter |
| Paul Schulte                                |                    |                  |                            |

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