July 28, 2019

Sermon Title: Free To….

Sermon for Richland Presbyterian Church

Texts Micah 6:1-8 (v.3, …How have I burdened you… v.8, …act justly…love mercy…walk humbly…)

Matthew 22:34-40, (v. 37, …love the lord… v39, …love your neighbor…)

John 13:34-35, (v.34, A New Command…)

Ignorance of the Law is no excuse. We can be guilty of breaking a law, even if we didn’t know there was a law about whatever it was we did. I’ve heard it said that it might be breaking the law if we remove one of those laundry tags on our clothing. I checked on Google and found that there is a law which says a woman must have her husband’s permission to cut her hair and it can’t be cut on a Sunday. Here in Kalamazoo it is the law that you can’t publicly serenade your girlfriend. It seems it is still the law that you can let your pig run free in Detroit ONLY if it has a ring in its nose. More to the point, if you drive 70 miles per hour on one of Michigan’s back country dirt roads you are breaking the law even if there is no speed limit sign. It is still breaking the law if there is a sign and it is covered over with weeds, or snow, such that you can’t see it. Ignorance is no excuse. It can be noted that there are literally hundreds of public laws which affect us every day; we simply don’t know what they are nor whether or not we are breaking them.

How many of us can recite all Ten Commandments? And even if you can’t, are you sure you are keeping them and not breaking them? We are taught by Jesus that they are still in effect, still current. God gave them to us through Moses, then Moses interpreted the Ten into the 27 chapters of the Book of Leviticus, which ends “these are the commands God gave Moses…” How many of the laws in those 27 chapters can you recite? Do you know what they are? Are you keeping them? Uh, Uh, Un, can’t get out of it by saying they are no longer in effect because of Jesus, or because they apply only to the Old Testament Hebrews. Jesus taught He “fulfilled the Law” not overturned it. So how many laws have you broken? Ignorance is no excuse.

“Enough is enough” is what is plaguing the people in the time of Micah the Prophet. The people have been complaining God expects too much. There are too many laws, too many interpretations, too many applications. We can’t be expected to remember them all, much less to obey them all, much less to be held guilty for breaking one of these laws we can’t remember. Micah writes down God’s reaction to the complaint. God asks, How, in what way, have I burdened you, my Chosen People? God goes on, it’s OK if you can’t recite all the laws, and they are too many and too much a burden, so how about this way? What is it, continues God, I have asked? The Ten Commandments and all of Leviticus can be boiled down to three: 1-Act Justly; 2-Love Mercy; 3-Walk Humbly with (Me) your God. That’s it. That’s the Ten Commandments in Three. Do you see the Ten Commandments here? Act Justly and Love Mercy are the last 7 commandments. Walk Humbly with God is the first 3.

Back to Micah. “Act Justly” means treating each other in a worthy respectful honest honorable manner without judgement, prejudice, “Love Mercy” means forgiving and forgiving again, granting another chance, turning the other cheek, bringing generosity to need or disaster, being compassionate or in the older definition of the word, being a pathetic person, sharing, or being stirred by, the emotions and concerns of others. “Walk Humbly with your God” means living your daily life accepting the free gift of Grace, literally walking hand in hand with God, acknowledging, believing the reality that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is right there beside you wanting the best for you, inspiring the best from you, being overwhelmed that God should really, really, love you, love me, of all people.

Easier right? Well, no, not really.

Jesus is in the middle of a hostile crowd, all seeking to embarrass him. One critic, a lawyer of all people who works daily trying to wiggle through the Ten Commandments and the Book of Leviticus, asks what is probably inside humor in legal-lawyer circles. Of all the Commandments and Laws, which one is the most important. Jesus says, Now stop, there are really only two Commandments, and they stand equal, Love God and Love your neighbor. Love God is the first three of the Ten Commandments; Love your neighbor is the following seven. Later Jesus would offer a corollary to Love your neighbor, applying it specifically to His Followers, ultimately to all of us, Love One Another. Let there be no dissention, no arguments, no anger between Christians, but love each other first and foremost and always.

When you get down to it, this law stuff, whether Ten Commandments, or 37 chapters of interpretation and application, or three principles, or two principles and one corollary, is pretty heavy stuff. God’s people have always been taught to look large. Expand your vision. Seek the broadest interpretation. Remember Jesus taught that to have angry thought about your neighbor was in essence murder, breaking the 5th Commandment, or violating “love mercy”, or violating “love your neighbor”. The common phrase “Oh, God” when uttered in anger, may will be breaking the 2nd Commandment, or violating “walk humbly” or “Love God” which Jesus said was the greatest of the co-equal Laws.

Our struggle has always been a tension between wanting to be living our Faith and wanting freedom. We want to know what the rules are yet want to keep those rules as few as possible so they don’t interfere with what we want to do, or the pleasures we want to pursue. We think we know what is right and wrong but we are often confused by the self-defined or selfish wants of some people. We, at least those of us who claim Christ Jesus, want/ should want to believe our standards of right and wrong are Godly, Christian, based on the Ten Commandments, and the teachings of Jesus. There are some of us that want to believe the basic foundation of our whole national legal system lies upon the Ten Commandments however summarized. And I wish there were more people will to say so.

Our Christian Faith is not based on a series of “noes” and “thou shalt nots”. Our Christian Faith is based on the hows, how to live with God, how to live with each other.

Keeping the Law of God, in any and all of its forms, is hard. God the Father knows this. God the Son showed A Way while also showing that mistakes can be and are taken care of. God the Holy Spirit dwells within giving daily hourly minute by minute guidance, strength, empowering us to do our best in following the Law and avoiding breaking it.

Remember when Jesus said come to me all you are weary and heavy burdened. Put on my yoke. My Yoke is easy, my burden is light? We are weary of struggling through all the dos and don’ts of this world, weighed down just trying to get through another day. Jesus says His Yoke, meaning God’s Laws, are easy and light. Truth overcomes deceit. Light overcomes dark. Right overcomes wrong. Justice overcomes wrong. Mercy overcomes hate and prejudice. Humility before God overcomes selfishness and arrogance. God’s Law overcomes chaos.

Amen