

## **2 Pentecost B**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15  
Psalm 81:1-10  
2 Corinthians 4:5-12  
Mark 2:23-3:6

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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. Amen.

Last week we concluded our Adult Confirmation class. As you might expect we looked at all kinds of different topics: some history, Martin Luther, inclusion, interpreting the Bible and of course worship.

Did you know that the traditional welcome to worship was given so that people coming would be reminded that in God they were safe, loved, accepted, and welcomed? The world was a harsh place of judgment and violence for the new believers – and it was as if when they gathered on Sundays they would say to one another “Phew! You made it! So glad you’re here!” And so the tradition became “The grace of Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” So too, this is how I usually begin my sermons (In grace and peace) because I want us to all be reminded that this is how God wants to build a relationship with us – founded on love, peace and acceptance.

This small act is actually very counter cultural. In the world we might too often experience otherwise: bullying at school or even in our place of work, an increasing threat of terrorism, endless wonder about our political, environmental and economic wellbeing, a culture that tells us we never measure up whether it be because we aren’t skinny enough or smart enough or rich enough or “any enough.” But in here, you are enough. That’s because God made you who you are, and if God made you, you are enough.

We often talk about Jesus’ love for all, but we seldom recognize its revolutionary character. Look again at the story from Mark today. Have you ever walked the river valley and picked wild saskatoons as you went along? Or through a garden and helped yourself to a handful of peas or even pulled a carrot? Such things don’t sound very counter cultural at all, but the day that Jesus and the disciples walked along a grain field and picked grain to satisfy their hunger, the moment Jesus put compassion into action and healed a withered hand – it was newsworthy – in fact it was “court-room-worthy,” because it was illegal.

We might disagree or want to dismiss the fact that Jesus broke the law that day; these are not things we would call a crime. But if I might suggest, in these acts Jesus was pointing out part of a system that had gotten out

of control, a system that no longer put God's beloved people first, but the system itself instead.

Such unhealthy systems are actually slavery. We heard in Deuteronomy "remember that you were a slave in Egypt..." Just think for a moment what it might be like to be a slave. We've told various parts of the story of the slavery of the Hebrew people in Egypt. Even without living back then, we could probably name something of such a lifestyle.

But then God rescued them. Parting the Red Sea, feeding them manna in the wilderness, water from the rock - God had to take good care of them because they didn't know how to do it for themselves. All they knew was doing what they were told, because that's what a slave does.

Once they were free, they had to learn to be free. They had to break the habit of allowing anyone else to be master over them and to trust God instead. *Remember once you were a slave, but now you are not...*

God didn't want them trading one form of slavery for another. He didn't want them to toil endlessly for that which would not give life, or to continue in the culture of power imbalance, or to step on one another in an effort to survive and get ahead. The day of rest was made for God's people, not people to have to adhere to a rule of rest. In the same way, Jesus, putting his own needs first and the needs of those with him, he disobeys the Sabbath law, picks the grain, heals a withered hand all in the name of human need and compassion.

The root of it all wasn't to make trouble, but to uncover the troublesome ways that already existed. Jesus' love demonstrated in simple acts over and over again revealed a sick system, an unhealthy but familiar way of relationship, an oppressive hierarchy.

And none of that is the way of faith.

We've seen counter-cultural acts like this in more recent history. Acts that may have in another time or place been insignificant, but at the right time, in the right place, to the right situation they speak loudly. Could you name some? For example, Rosa Parks, who simply sat on a bus and sparked a revolution of equality. We've seen the "Me Too" movement stand up and bring voice to harassment and abuse of power. We've seen student protests uncover the deep roots of gun violence. We've seen protests by First Nations people bringing attention to the needs of creation and issues like housing, health care and more. Even the Pride Parade this coming weekend, is counter-cultural as oppressed people say "no more."

Think about the power of love in your own life. That small word of love changes everything when it's gifted to us by another. A child's hug can calm your soul, an adult child caring for an aging parent, the first time someone looks you in the eye and says "I love you." In such moments our world is changed. That's revolutionary.

It's hard though to not succumb to slavery. Over and over again we must relearn what it means that we are free. That's why over and over again we are greeted in grace, love and peace when we come here. Over and over again we hear "Jesus loves you." And each day we're encouraged to pray as Jesus taught us.

Remember you are slaves no more. Not to employers, to mortgages, to expectations, to youthfulness, to government to oppression to anything else because God in Christ has made us free. Go into the world then and change it by simply living as a free child of God. Amen.