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Luke 6:1-5

Lent 2: Feasting in the Fields

This week we continue our Lenten series, Hunger for Home: Food and Meals in the Gospel of Luke. Last week Pastor Lisa preached about the feeding of the 5000 and our hunger for more than mere bread - our hunger for the bread of community. This week we are going to talk about food and the sabbath.

But before we get to today's text, we need a little bit of background. Early in Jesus ministry - back in chapter 4 of Luke, he went to his hometown of Nazareth - to the synagogue on the sabbath day - and read several verses from the prophet Isaiah where it is written: (Luke 4:18-19)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

When he finished the reading, Jesus claims the scripture is now fulfilled through him.

He then goes about healing, preaching, and calling the disciples. This is where we pick up this morning's text. Listen now to the word of God in Luke 6:1-5:

One sabbath while Jesus was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?” Then he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

This is the world of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Have you ever walked along a field of grain - or maybe driven across Kansas - or maybe you've seen the movie *Gladiator* where Russel Crowe's character is walking through the field, his hands grazing the top of the wheat?

They are my favorite fields, the way they glow golden in the sun and wave in the wind. The ways they look soft and smell fresh. It is as if every thing about them is praising God. They induce a sense of awe in me.

I wonder if the newly called disciples were experiencing a sense of awe on this sabbath day - a day set aside by God in the 10 commandments for rest - for pausing work and attending to God. They have, after all, been called to follow him, and have witnessed his healings.

I wonder if they are aware of their hunger and mindful of their eating, or if they are reaching out as they walk to touch the wheat - to feel the grain against their hands - as a way of grounding themselves - plucking the grain and eating it along the way.

It is important to recognize that they are not breaking the law by plucking the grain and eating it. It would only have been considered stealing if they had carried it away. The hungry had the right to food - and could take what they needed.¹ There was provision in the law to give permission for the poor to glean the fields, AND guidelines for field owners not to harvest the field edges or pass over their harvest a second time so that there would be provision for the poor - and for the foreigner.²

The law the Pharisees are really questioning is breaking the sabbath. The Pharisees often get a bad rap. They love the law. So let's consider that keeping the sabbath holy was believed to be a sign of faithfulness to God. The better you could hold to the commandment, which requires rest for everyone - including servants, foreigners, and even animals, the more faithfulness you showed. It is hard for us to relate to the importance of this commandment today in a world that doesn't seem to ever stop - but it was a big deal to the Jewish people in Jesus time, so a lot of attention was paid to what was lawful - and in this case, the reaping and threshing - plucking and rubbing the grain in their hands - was work and what was unlawful.³

It seems that the Pharisees are questioning the disciples, and Jesus comes to their defense with this story about David found in 1 Samuel that Tom read. What point is

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez. *Luke: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 88.

² Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 24:19-22

³ Gonzalez. *Luke: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 89.

Jesus trying to make by referencing David breaking the law by eating the bread of the presence and sharing it with his companions?

The Pharisees must have been asking themselves and others, “who does this Jesus think he is? Healing people, claiming he is the fulfillment of scripture, and breaking the laws of the sabbath?” New Testament Scholar NT Wright suggests this is the precise question that Luke wants us to ask - Who did Jesus think he was?⁴

In this passage from 1 Samuel, David is with a group of his followers and staying away from Saul, who was still sitting on the throne even though he had anointed David king. Wright argues that David is the exception to the rule that only priests should eat the bread of the presence, because he was the rightful king of Israel waiting for his time to rule. In citing this passage, Jesus is making a parallel between himself and David. Jesus is also anointed and will be King of Israel.

Then we have Jesus’ statement, “The son of Man is lord of the Sabbath”. Cuban-American Theologian Justo Gonzalez says. “He (Jesus) is making a statement about himself and his mission as bringing creation to its intended order. What God intends for all human creation is fulfilled in Jesus.”

So what is it that God intends? What is it that is fulfilled in Jesus?

Let’s look back again at Luke 4 and the passage that Jesus claims has been fulfilled in him in the prophet Isaiah. It reads:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Reflecting on these words in light of Jesus’ response to the pharisees, let’s pull out two of the pieces that Jesus claims he had been anointed for:

1. To bring good news to the poor
2. To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor

Jesus, in not rebuking the disciples for plucking and crushing the grain recognizes that hunger is a physical human need and that fulfilling that need is important. That

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), 50.

is good news for the poor. We recognize this as we serve and give to Advent House, Loaves and Fishes, and our food pantries.

In his response to the Pharisees his claim that The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath reframes the sabbath law to its original intent - to love God and love neighbor - in order to bring about the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus is saying that in him, God's future kingdom is now -and one day - and to teach us how to live into that kingdom - now and one day.

Theologian Walter Brueggeman in his book, *Sabbath as Resistance*, points to sabbath rest setting the stage for the rest of the commandments which teach us how to be neighbors.⁵ Nit-picking laws that allow the poor to go hungry does not prove faithfulness to God and does not further God's kingdom. Strict adherence to the rules of not working were getting in the way of hungry people being fed.

I wonder what this story would look like, if Jesus were to appear in the United States today - where poverty is higher than in any other developed country - and where we have access to almost anything we want all the time. Grocery stores are open 24/7, fast food restaurants are open late and some restaurants are even open 24/7. Gas stations too. Where our worth is judged by how hard we can work, how much we can produce, how far we can get ahead. Where too many people work multiple low-wage jobs in order to have enough food and to have adequate housing, often without health insurance or the means for a savings. In Michigan, that living wage for single person is \$20.28⁶ and yet nearly 1/3 of workers in the US earn less than \$15 hour.⁷

Too often, the most vulnerable among us are not only hungry for food, they are hungry for rest. Physical rest and rest from worrying about how to put the next meal on the table or how to make rent. Rest from wondering where the money to fix the car will come from. Rest from worrying about how to pay back student loans because a college degree has become a theoretical prerequisite for success. Rest from not having healthcare and fear of getting sick, let alone rest from being sick and having to figure out how to pay the medical bills. Rest from worrying about how so much stress and work is making them sick in body, mind and spirit.

And it is not only the most vulnerable among us who are hungry for rest. We are all hungry for rest - true rest that allows us to see that God loves us just because - that we can't earn that love by our busy-ness, accomplishments, and bank accounts. We

⁵ Walter Brueggemann. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 69.

⁶ <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/26>

⁷ <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/the-crisis-of-low-wages-in-the-us/>

are hungry for the rest that comes from living in an attitude of abundance rather than one of scarcity - of fear that if someone else has enough, there won't be enough for me. Perhaps this is where Jesus would rebuke us, as he did the Pharisees. We are assured again and again by Christ and by God that there is enough and that we are to live into that assurance, and to spend time delighting in God.

When we do not insist upon rest for ourselves and for others, we are less able to be neighborly- less able to recognize and care for the poor and oppressed. When the poor are not fed, neither can they rest. It is a cycle that spins on itself. We bear a responsibility to God, as we claim ourselves followers of Christ, to examine how our lack of rest affects not only ourselves as individuals, but how it affects our families and our communities. We bear a responsibility to hear ourselves say "I'm so tired" and resist the systems that ask us to give more than we have and run us out of energy for serving God and one another. For those who have the benefit of education and good paying jobs, we have a responsibility to learn what it is to be otherwise, and to stand with those who are struggling, and to live in an attitude of abundance enough for everyone. We have a responsibility to not assume we know the challenges that those in poverty face, but to walk alongside them, hear their stories, share a meal with them, invite them to rest, and to work for justice so that all may have enough - food and rest, safety and shelter. For Jesus is the Human One, the Son of Man, the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who has been anointed to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he invites us into the work not just for one day, but for this day. Amen.

Let us return with the disciples to the grainfield. Are you mindful of your hunger and needing to pluck and eat the grain? Are you resting in the sabbath, enjoying the fruits of the harvest? Or are you far from the fields, longing for the abundance offered there? Jesus is here for you, and calling you to rest and calling you to love your neighbor.

Let us pray,

Lord of the Sabbath,

You have told us who you are, the anointed one of God, who came to show us how to love you and love one another. Help us to rest in you and to work to ensure that others have rest too, so that we may be fed in body and in spirit. Amen.