

Luke 6:1-16
Jesus the Progressive!
WRCoB 1.31.21

In earlier times, people took Sabbath rest seriously.

Following the Sunday morning church service
And the traditional Sunday noon dinner
Folks were limited in what they could do.

You couldn't **do** anything "enjoyable".

My grandfather said you couldn't play baseball
Go fishing or play games.

In fact, you couldn't speak loud or laugh
Or goof around.

You had to speak in muted tones
Not raise your voice
And certainly no laughter.

I suppose people took seriously that God was resting
And didn't want to be disturbed.

Even though, Christians, moved the Sabbath
From the seventh day to the first day of the week.

I guess they figured God changed his Sabbath rest
From Saturday to Sunday.

~

About the only thing you could do is nap and read.

And of course, the preferred reading was the Bible.

Sunday was meant for fun.

This was true not only with my religiously strict grandfather
But true in almost all church traditions.

~~

There is this story about a pastor
Who served two parishes in Holland.

In the winter, on Sundays
When he wanted to save time
He skated the river between the two churches.

Of course, someone turned him in
Since the church considered skating pleasurable.

The two church councils called him in
And told him he must stop skating on Sundays.

The pastor argued that by skating
He was able spend more time at his parishes.

The two councils huddled together and talked about this.

After a few minutes
They came to a decision.

They would allow the pastor to skate on Sunday mornings
On one condition . . .
He **must** not enjoy himself.

Jesus, in our Scripture Lesson today
Also dealt with issues surrounding the Sabbath.

The rules and regulations were extremely legalistic
And the Pharisees wanted them followed at all costs.

Well this annoyed Jesus.

Jesus wasn't concerned about the rules so much
As he was the health and wellbeing of people.

If his followers were hungry on the Sabbath
And bent the rules a little
He wasn't going to get bent out of shape.

However, the religious leaders of the day
(I call them church leaders)
Definitely had issues with it.

They called Jesus out
For allowing his followers to pick grain
While passing through a wheat field.

They asked, "how come?"
Jesus asked back, "why not?"

"King David ate the communion bread right off the altar?!"

On another Sabbath, so our story goes
Jesus and his followers were in a synagogue
And there was a man with a shriveled hand.

The church leaders secretly watched
What Jesus would do.

He saw them . . . there, all smug . . .
And decided to set an example.

He told the man with the shriveled hand to stand up
And asked them

“What’s the right thing to do here?”

“To save a life or destroy it?
To do something good and to do something evil.”

And then and there in front of the religious leaders
Inside their place of worship

In a “in your face” gesture
Jesus heals the man.

The leaders felt the smack
And decided they needed to silence Jesus.

~~

Ok, so let’s just make a point of observation here.

In this scenario, I’d consider Jesus a *progressive*.

No seriously, he challenges the religious *conservatives*.

They wanted strict adherence
To the rules and regulations of Judaism.

They wanted to *conserve*

The religious conventions of the day

Jesus as the *progressive* one, challenged

The rational of the religious practices of his time.

Jesus wanted change in his religious institution

Hence my label *progressive*.

He wanted to see the church progress.

From a New York Times article

On a completely unrelated subject

I read this sentence reminding me of today's text.

*Consider the words **conservative** and **progressive**. A conservative tends to prefer the status quo, while a progressive often favors change.*

Kind of fits Jesus here, doesn't it?

Not to say, that Jesus wanted change for change sake.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had this to say.

Matthew 5:17 NLT

¹⁷ “Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.

In another way, then, Jesus was also a *conservative*.

Jesus wanted to *conserve* the *spirit* of the law.
Not the *letter* of the law.

The Gospel of Mark shares this same story
As in our Scripture Lesson today.

But Mark adds these words from Jesus.

Mark 2:27-28 NLT

27 Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.

God intended the Sabbath to help people not burden them.

God meant the Sabbath to relieve people
From the relentless work and toil of life

The Pharisees, the *conservatives* of the day
Made the Sabbath a legalistic hoop
People had to jump through.

People worried more about breaking a Sabbath law
Than they were resting from a long and hard week.

Sabbath had lost its initial meaning and purpose.

~~

There’s a story about an elderly conservative woman
Who upon reading this particular scripture
Said in a derogatory way

“Jesus? Oh, he was a liberal!”

If the elderly conservative woman meant

That Jesus was *liberal*

Because he came to *liberate* the oppressed

And offer *liberty* to all

Then she was spot on.

Make no mistake . . . the God of the Bible

Is a liberating God.

Liberation is central to God’s message of salvation.

The liberation of the enslaved Hebrew people in Egypt

Was **the** defining moment in Judaism.

God promised freedom

And delivered them out of captivity

In a tremendous display of power!

So too, this liberation became the signature act of God

In the ethos of the enslaved African American.

Their hope rested on the God of Liberation.

This is where the study of liberation theology comes from.

That a thread runs throughout the Bible

That points to a liberating God.

Emphasizing "*social concern for the poor and political **liberation** for oppressed peoples.*"

In turn, Jesus becomes **the** liberator.

Through his teaching and preaching
Jesus liberates us from conventional thinking.

He gives us an unconventional worldview
That elevates the poor and marginalized
And condemns the rich and powerful.

Jesus is **the** liberator.

That in his death on the cross
He has liberated us from sin.

Jesus is **the** liberator.

That through his resurrection
Jesus liberates believers from death and mortality.

Jesus is **the** liberator capable of freeing us
From anything that ensnares, entangles and enslaves.

~~

Now, I confess to playing a little with the words
liberal, progressive and conservative.

In all serious, however, I am not sure I can label Jesus
Either *liberal* or *conservative.*

And if I did
I'd probably be given my walking papers!

Jesus transcends all of our labels.

Surely, Christian conservatives
Would never call Jesus a *liberal*

Just as no Christian liberal would call Jesus *conservative*.

I believe Jesus doesn't fit any of our molds.

He is both *progressive* and *conservative*
And he is neither.

Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man
Is our personal Savior
And he is Savior of the world.

~~

In our story today, Jesus sought to liberate people
From the stiff and cold-hearted religion
The Pharisees stood for and practiced.

Jesus is the *conservative* calling us
To *conserve* God's original purposes.

Jesus is the *progressive* calling us
To *challenge* the religious conventions of our day.

Jesus is the *liberal* who came to *liberate* all peoples
From all the "isms", the sins
That seek to control, corrupt, and oppress.

And my prayer is this . . .
That spiritually, physically, and emotionally
All humanity can one day come together

And shout out Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous words
From his *I Have a Dream* speech

**“Free at last, Free at last
Thank God almighty we are free at last!”**

~~

(Transition to the Altar)

Jesus was always the guest.

In the homes of Peter and Jairus
Martha and Mary, Joanna and Susanna
He was always the guest.

At the meal tables of the wealthy
Where he pled the case of the poor
He was always the guest.

Upsetting polite company
Befriending isolated people
He was always the guest.

But here, at this table, Jesus is the host.

Those who wish to serve him
Must first be served by him
Those who want to follow him
Must first be fed by him

Those who would wash his feet
Must first let him make them clean.

For this is the table where God intends us to be nourished

This is the time when Christ can make us new.

So come, you who hunger and thirst
For a deeper faith
For a fuller life
For a better world.

Jesus Christ
Who sat at our tables
Now invites us to be guests at his.