

“The Sabbath Is for You”
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus
concerning Mark 2:23-3:6
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco
on June 3, 2018

Portland, Oregon is one of my favorite places in the U.S., where people seem to breathe freedom and breed originality, where the trees are so tall you have to crane your neck to see the tops, where vivid flowers and blooming gardens are so prolific it smells of heaven, where everywhere you turn you see green. I go there often to restore my soul.

In 2014—so, back in the olden days, back even before the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage—I took one of my best friends, Aurelia, to my favorite Oregon spots, and she took me to her favorite—her Aunt Tina’s. We stayed with Tina in Portland in a cozy window-wrapped home drenched in plant life, where hospitality greeted you at the door with a kiss and a glass of wine.

Shortly before we traveled to Oregon, Tina had asked Aurelia, would Aurelia officiate her wedding? After all, we would already be in Portland. After all, Aurelia was just recently ordained. After all, it was finally legal in Oregon that year for Tina to marry her love.

It would be a flash wedding, meaning, they planned the whole wedding in a week. They hosted it in their own backyard, and I have never attended a wedding anything like it. With such late notice, they expected maybe twenty-five guests. Seventy-five people showed up, squeezed gleefully into the small yard. It was so beautiful; I was mesmerized. In her wedding homily, Aurelia told Tina and London, “I don’t so much feel compelled to tell you what your love should be, but to celebrate what your love already is.” And celebrate we did. Guests stayed until the wee hours of the morning, tipsy on sheer happiness. When I got home, I wrote a poem titled, “The Wedding.”

Aurelia had told Tina, yes,
she would officiate the wedding in Oregon.
Then she and I discussed the risks.
Blessing same-sex marriage
can be career suicide
when you’re a Baptist pastor
from Texas. But. God only knows
how we were ever ordained
in the first place, seeing as how
we’re not too keen
on following convention.
And. We knew this was no time
to start towing the line.

The day of the wedding,
guests squeezed
into Tina and London's backyard,
huddled together like family,
like the best of friends,
like church without any of the damning words.
Everyone wanted to be there.

After 18 years
of faithful commitment,
making it legal
was icing on the cake.

The cake: which London serves
first to her bride, then to us,
sharing cake from her fork
into the mouths of guests
like holy communion.

I sneak away
from the celebrating crowd
and cry. Tina waited 18 years to marry;
she's now almost 60. I think of myself in
my early 20s, how easy it was
to marry a violent man. Not a single legal
obstacle to prevent
an abuser from marriage.
He can marry again and again
and no state in this union
will try to stop him.

If you have to
label something sinful,
label that.

If you want to know
what transgression is,
ask me, and I will show you scars.

Jesus once healed a man on the Sabbath.
The fear-filled people
gripped their frosted hearts and cried,
"The Bible says you can't!"
God was dismayed.
"I just healed someone.

Open your eyes.”

I once attended a wedding in Oregon
that healed people,
where open-eyed guests danced
as if to drive fear into oblivion,
as if the law itself
had been kissed by some sweet magic
and turned into love.

I'm happy to report Tina and London are still happily married, I still see them on occasion, and, Aurelia did not lose her ordination or her job after officiating the wedding. In fact, her congregation in Round Rock, Texas recently voted unanimously to promote her to Lead Pastor of her congregation, and I will be preaching at her installation service next Sunday.

I will forever remember that wedding as one of the happiest I have ever attended. And to think, there were people, who, because of their religious convictions, missed it. People who could not participate in the party because they were compelled by their religion to disapprove and to condemn.

Listen to the ending of our Scripture story for today, “Jesus said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”

This healed man—what joy!! These Pharisees—what a terribly sad way to live, out to destroy that which brings life, that which brings healing, that which brings compassion.

The text says, “[Jesus] said to them, ‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?’ But they were silent.” And so “he looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart.” Then he turned his attention away from them and spoke instead to the man with the withered hand.

This turning away from his detractors and towards those in need is a defining mark of Jesus’ ministry. He always leaves room for the detractors to be converted—grace, after all, is available for everyone—but he doesn’t let them slow him down.

I love Jesus’ no-nonsense approach to the law. What heartache the church could avoid if we only followed Jesus’ example. It is lawful to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy life? If only we used Jesus’ lens when interpreting Scripture. If only we used Jesus’ eyes when looking at our neighbor.

This whole healing debacle in the Gospel of Mark started with something even simpler—the disciples snacking on grain in the fields outside because they were hungry. But they got caught, by the Pharisees, who insisted they should not do work on the sabbath. I’m reminded of a story I heard from a woman who once got caught as a child snacking on the leftover communion

crackers in the balcony of the church after worship. A deacon found her there, eating happily away. He scolded her fiercely, and sent her away in shame.

Jesus stands up for his disciples. Jesus doesn't deal in shame. In fact, as if the Pharisees had dared him to do more, Jesus waltzes into the temple on the lookout for some godly work to do on the sabbath. I love that about Jesus.

It's like we forget that God's laws are *for* us and for our benefit. Not just "us," like the small group of people gathered in this room. God's laws are for US, as in, for the benefit of everyone in the world. Sometimes when we've seen the Bible used to damage people, we think we'd like to leave the Bible and maybe God behind altogether. But there's actually some good stuff in there. Y'all. *The Sabbath is for you*. God didn't just give you permission to nap. God thought you so worthy of rest God made it *mandatory*, which is pretty awesome. But like, if your nap is getting in the way of your ability to love someone or if it's getting in the way of something else you need just as much, skip the nap that day. It's going to be okay.

That's not being flippant about the law. It's being serious about people whom God loves. If following the letter of the law blinds you from seeing the people's needs, then you've missed the point of the law . . . and you've missed the presence of God. The Pharisees didn't realize they were in the presence of the Son of God. They were too busy identifying all the ways Jesus was a threat to the law, too busy looking for ways to stop him and reasons to condemn him. In preserving their righteousness, they missed the party and they missed the presence of God.

The woman I mentioned earlier—the one who got in trouble for snacking on the communion wafers—told me that what healed her of her shame was attending a church where the pastor stood behind the communion table and told them to take as much bread as they wanted because there is always enough grace. He encouraged them to come back to the table after worship and eat more, if they wanted to, because there is always enough grace. He said anyone could have some, because there is always enough grace.

Friends, let us gather together and receive God's abundance. Do not hold back from the celebration. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Amen.