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Narrative Lectionary 2.19 Jesus Breaks the Rules
Mark 2:1-28

2 February 2020
Salem, Bridgeport

“Do You Want What Jesus Wants for You???”

Imagine that you've not been at church for a while,
And on the day you come back everything is different.
The pastor and assisting ministers and choir are no longer in robes.
Instead of bright lights with candles, the room is dim and there are colored lights flashing.
Instead of the organ playing classical music there's a band playing contemporary Christian songs.
There are no more hymnbooks but there's a screen up front with words.
Ok...what are you feeling right now? Shock? Anger? Fear? Resistance?

Then you can imagine what was happening in today's gospel.
Jesus was changing things and not everyone was happy.

Being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit had changed Jesus' life.
He now saw everything completely differently.
It was not about continuing traditions from the past.
It wasn't about traditions or the past at all.
It was about NOW.
He now understood that God's kingdom wasn't to be found in the past
and it wasn't to be found in the future.
God's kingdom could never be found in the past or the future.
It could only be found in the here and now.
God's kingdom was here! And now!
And he had to live in it. And invite others into it. And invite others to invite others into it!
It wasn't about religion; it was about LIFE!
Abundant life! A life of gratitude! A life overflowing with love and peace and hope and joy!
A life that was available to everyone and anyone – no matter who they were.

It was so awesome and incredible and amazing!
People were being healed!
People were realizing they were loved and accepted and treasured by God,
no matter who they were or what they had done or what society felt about them!
People were being set free from the letter of the law that oppressed and repressed and depressed them.
People were experiencing a joy they had never known before!

But for every miracle that happened, for every wondrous event occurred, for everyone whose life was enriched,
someone was always there to react with shock and anger and resistance!

It was crazy!
Instead of jumping up and down with joy upon seeing the paralyzed man stand up and walk,
the Pharisees were incensed at the words that had made it possible!
Instead of being excited that barriers of race and class and religion were being broken down, people were upset!
Instead of being happy for those who had found joy,
people wanted to oppress, repress, depress the life out of them.
Instead of taking hold of the new and abundant life Jesus was offering,
people were insisting on the old – not only for themselves but for everybody else.

Now when we read this story, where do we see ourselves?

Are we the paralyzed man who is rejoicing in a whole new life?

Or are we one of the Pharisees who is skeptical about such healings, suspicious of the healer,
and so wrapped up in negative criticisms and judgments that we completely miss the miracle?

Are we the people who have experienced surprising acceptance and belonging and love
by someone from whom we never expected it?

Or are we the people who are uncomfortable with those who are different
and prefer it when we don't have to interact with them?

Are we the people who understand that there's nothing more required than to love God and love neighbor?

Or do we insist on the importance of maintaining our customs and traditions and rules
even when they drive people away?

What Jesus wanted for people 2,000 years ago, Jesus wants for us today.

And what Jesus wants is to invite us into a whole new life,

an abundant life, a life of gratitude, a life overflowing with peace and love and hope and joy.

Jesus wants to change us, to transform us, to make us new.

More often than not, we respond to change with shock, anger, fear and resistance.

But it's never too late – the choice remains continually before us.

If you are looking for the abundant life Jesus offers, a life of gratitude,

a life in which hope and peace and love are not dependent on anyone or anything outside of you,

a life in which never-ending joy bubbles up from within, our gospel points to three ways to find it.

The first way is to believe that just like the paralyzed man on the stretcher, you can be healed.

No matter what has been keeping you from living that abundant life up to now, Jesus is able to free you from it.

No matter who you are, or what you've done, or what situation you're currently in,

Jesus can transform you – heart and soul and body and mind.

But only if you believe he can. Miracles are possible - even for you.

The second way is to understand that like Jesus

you will find joy in building relationships with people who are different from you.

And by that I mean more than being polite to someone different who shows up at worship or our food pantry.

Jesus wasn't just being polite.

Jesus went out of his way to share meals with people unlike him, to hang out with them,

to laugh and party with them, to build friendships with them.

You can find happiness in relationships with people like you, but the place you'll find abundant life

is not with people of your own age, your own race, your own class, your own sexual orientation.

The joy comes when God works

and those roadblocks are removed, those barriers are broken, and those obstacles are overcome.

And the third way is to be willing to let go of everything for the sake of the gospel.

Paul says that we must become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might save some.

If a tradition that is near and dear to me is getting in the way of someone experiencing God's love, then I must let go of it.

Jesus came that people might have life and have it abundantly.

A paralyzed man stood up and walked.

People that society had looked down on because of their race and class and religion

experienced the love and fellowship and friendship of Jesus.

People were set free from laws and rules, from traditions and customs,

from everything from the past that held them back from a new and better and more glorious life.

We can respond with shock, anger, fear, and resistance,

or we can trust in God's power and love and open our hearts and minds and bodies and spirits

to the new life, the abundant life, the spirit-filled life Jesus offers.

Right here. Right now.

Amen