

Sunday, January 31, 2021
Mantua Center Christian Church
MCCC Remote Worship

Order of Worship

PRELUDE

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS - Chad

Good Morning everyone!

Welcome to the Mantua Center Christian Church. We are a community seeking to have open minds, open hearts, and open arms. We gather not as perfect people, but people on a journey seeking to live and love like Jesus!

Today in worship we will explore a wonderful passage in the Gospel of Luke about what is more important to Jesus. In this day and age where truth itself feels obscured and we're sometimes quite sure what is right, Jesus cuts through the gray area with some guidance for how we live and love.

As we prepare to open our minds and hearts for worship, let's take a deep breath and Light a Candle.

Together we have set this time and space aside for the worship of God. Let's give to God our joys, worries, and sorrows and open ourselves up to what God has to say to us today. Let us worship the Lord...

SONG - Weave (Pam and Beth - in the folder)

*Weave, weave, weave us together. Weave us together in unity and love.
Weave, weave, weave us together. Weave us together, together in love.*

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 92:1-4

OPENING HYMN We Gather Together (chalice)

CHILDREN'S MOMENT - Ally Hurd

PASTORAL PRAYER - Sarah Smith

SONG RESPONSE Open My Eyes, Lord (Pam and Beth - in folder)

*Open our eyes Lord. We want to see Jesus.
To reach out and touch Him. And say that we love Him.
Open our ears Lord. And help us to listen.
Open our eyes Lord. We want to see Jesus.*

SCRIPTURE READING **Luke 6:1-16**

SERMON - The Grey Area - Chad Delaney

Before reading and reflecting on our scripture today I want to offer some words of context that I believe are important as we read this regarding Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees in the passage.

Over the last few years, in our country we've seen anti-Semitism and violence against our Jewish neighbors go up. Charlottesville, the shootings at the Tree of Life synagogue, and the symbolism displayed during the recent Jan 6 Capitol insurrection have been most visible, but there have been 1000s of reported hate crimes against our Jewish neighbors in recent years. This has many roots and factors to it throughout history, but one we must own is the groundswell of Christian support and complicity in it. Christians, for many centuries, have enacted hate speech and actions against Jewish folks and holding stereotypes and promoting conspiracy. One way that clergy and churches have done this is by demonizing "the Pharisee and the Sadducee" in the scriptural story. Jesus himself, came from the school of Pharisees, and yes, had some stark disagreements with them as well. But those he disagrees with should not be seen as "the Jews who didn't get Jesus", but instead as part of a community of argumentation within Jesus' own fellowship. They had lots of disagreement, but we must remember that Jesus was Jewish and healthy debate was part of what it meant to be a Jewish rabbi at the time. We cannot use these stories as tools to denigrate a whole people. For far too long, Christians have been fertile ground to the conspiracy-mongering and stereotyping of the Jewish community...that needs to end. We must do our part to promote healthy interfaith connections and respect for other faith traditions. Let's root out the hate within us and our communities to move forward together.

Our passage today is...

Luke 6:1-11

One sabbath while Jesus was going through the cornfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. ²But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' ³Jesus answered, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴He 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?' ⁵Then he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'

The Man with a Withered Hand

⁶On another sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. ⁸Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand,

‘Come and stand here.’ He got up and stood there. ⁹Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?’ ¹⁰After looking around at all of them, he said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

God’s word for God’s People, thanks be to God. Let us pray....

The Gray Area

My dad told me when I was a kid that “you live and die by the gray area.” I don’t know what kind of mischief I had gotten into that required that bit of wisdom, but I’m grateful for it and it’s stuck with me ever since. Basically, in a lot of life’s toughest and most important situations the “right” thing won’t always be clear to us.

I’ve learned through my own experience that he’s right...It’s just that the gray area stinks. I’d much rather have up and down, left and right, right and wrong...CLEAR distinctions so that I can align myself with the correct one.

We all get this gray area thing. You didn’t have to see *Les Miserables* or *Aladdin* to wonder if there may be a situation in which it would be OK to steal a loaf of bread, to go *one jump ahead of the breadline*. Is it ever ok to steal? Lie? Even kill? I mean these are 10 commandments...you know, like, the most important theological and ethical commands in our tradition...yet, all of us can imagine some scenario in which it may be OK...maybe even morally correct to break any one one of those.

In our scripture today we see how those conversations can go. Now...for us here and now...breaking the Sabbath may not be one of the biggest concerns on our list, but...it is one of the Big 10. A very important concern for Jesus and the community in which he’s a part.

Now the Pharisees that gave Jesus such a hard time were likely not strangers to the gray area. They appear quite stingy in the story, but likely they all thought about and debated their colleagues about what circumstances might exist where breaking one of the commandments would be acceptable. Maybe they were having a bad day or perhaps Jesus was just getting under some of their skins.

I mean you can see it from the Pharisees point of view right? Jesus, do you have to pluck the grains today? Why couldn’t you have done that yesterday or find some other way to get food? Do you really have to heal that guys hand right here and now? Why not do it on the sly tomorrow and make such a big deal out of it. You are flouting scripture and breaking tradition when you don’t have to. Why are you muddying the waters with this clear command in scripture? Why here and why now?

They're upset and breaking the sabbath is a big deal----Jesus is plucking grains and healing on the sabbath...what gives him the right to break this practice? Who gave him the authority to deviate from the practice and why? What reasons would be enough to overturn scripture and tradition? *AND* Believe me, whenever you are thinking of breaking some long-held tradition or belief, somewhere someone is going to be searching the scriptures as to why you are wrong. So who's right? Who gets to rule the gray area?

Well, in the passages Jesus heard their arguments, their biblical interpretations, their issues...and he wasn't impressed. He knows what the bible says. He knows what the tradition is. But he does it anyway. There seems to at least be several criteria for him about why it was OK to break this hallowed and biblical command. 1. To irritate his brethren (OK, no...I'm kidding). But really, the exceptions he uses is to feed the hungry and to bring life and healing to someone in need. These were enough to break the Sabbath customs.

Today, we have a lot of gray area to navigate. Under normal circumstance we have all the differing ways of viewing all the issues of our day. Then toss in a pandemic and sheesh, it's just that much harder. So many traditions, norms, and expectations about what is and should be, absolutely shattered in our daily lives. Extraordinary exceptions and situations have emerged that have caused us to make decisions we thought we'd never have to make. Predictability and any kind of certainty with life was always folly, but has been even more complicated in this time.

Darn that gray area.

I'm so thankful for the example of Jesus. He does give us something wonderful to consider and think about. Rev. Kendra Mohn says, "This text names the needs of others—to do good and to preserve life—as the criteria for choosing to act differently than before...Asking which approaches preserve the lives of our neighbors can help guide us forward. If there is to be action on the sabbath, it is not for harm or destruction, but for the feeding and healing of the world."

Gray area is nothing new and is not going away. Over the next year we will have lots of decisions to make as individuals, families, and as a congregation. What will guide us? Will it be our own personal preferences? The pursuit of happiness for me and my family? Will we think about the needs of others? Christ, by his life and words, gives us an example. Jesus cuts through the messiness and reminds of what is most important---feeding people, giving life and healing, Love. These are more important than our personal preferences and desires, even more important than our long held traditions, biblical commands, or even one of the 10 commandments. May Christ's way guide us and lead us through the gray area. And may we always be reminded that Jesus lived and died and rose again to erase the Gray area about whether God loves us and would stay with us. No matter what hardships and murky waters we face, Christ will love us and be beside us. So then, may we seek to live and love and serve our neighbors, strangers, and even our enemies in his likeness.

HOLY COMMUNION -**Communion Song - Old Rugged Cross (Chalice)****Meditation**

Communion Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Words of Institution

As we gather around Christ's Table we remember that on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread and broke it, gave thanks and said to his Disciples, "This is my body which is give for you, eat of it all of you in remembrance of me." In like manner he took the cup and blessed it saying, "This is the cup of the new covenant in me, as often as you drink of it do so in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's life, death, and resurrection until he comes again. Remember, all...ALL are welcome at the Lord's Table.

(Share in the Bread and Cup together)

CLOSING SONG**Take My Life (chalice)****BENEDICTION - Sarah Smith**