

## **Breaking the rules**

**June 3, 2018**

May the words that I speak and the words that you hear be God's alone. Amen

Oh, that pesky Jesus. Always pushing the limits, always leaning on the boundaries. Sometimes it seems that to him, rules were made to be broken. This is certainly NOTHING I could possibly relate to, right? I mean, my personal rules to live by include "It's better to ask forgiveness than permission" and the idea that speed limits are really only suggestions. And the gospels are full of stories that illustrate that attitude of Jesus.

Professor at Drew University, prolific writer and blogger Leonard Sweet points out that yes, "every child needs rules. But there comes a time when you stop living by the rules and start loving from the heart. From healing on the Sabbath, to eating with unwashed hands and unclean people, to allowing his disciples to swipe food from another person's field, to declaring himself God, Jesus flouted rules, violated taboos, and promoted behavior nightmarishly wrong in the eyes of the establishment. Jesus would break the rules to bless you." I love that. "Jesus would break the rules to bless you".

Oh, which reminds me- let's take a little side trip for a second. Did you guys watch the royal wedding? Did you see Bishop Curry's sermon on the power of love? Holy smoke. But I was especially mesmerized by the expressions on the faces of the people in the congregation, royal or otherwise. This was a ceremony that definitely broke rules and included things that are just Not Done. And it made lots of people uncomfortable and I loved it. The royal boundaries were already being pushed by the presence of a gospel choir and let's face it, the lovely bride herself, but honestly. We do not Express Emotion. And Bishop Curry was reminding us, all of us, that like we said in the beginning, there come a time when we stop living by the rules and start loving from the heart. And it was making people very, very uneasy.

Okay, now going back to today's gospel. At this point, Jesus is standing on the Pharisees last nerve. He has been breaking rules left and right and clearly he has no respect for the Sabbath, set aside by God as a day of rest, to be kept holy. He even goes so far as to ask what is more important, laws or the people the laws are created to protect. Scandalous. "And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath." It's time to stop living by the rules and start loving from the heart.

Mr Sweet points out that Jesus didn't break rules just to be a rebel, to be the New Testament version of James Dean. (Kids, ask your grandparents who that was) Rather, he says "Jesus had an overriding, wild-card rule: break any of the rules of the Sabbath sooner than do anything outright unkind or unloving or unsupportive of life. Always support life...What mattered to Jesus

was not keeping the law, but helping the hurting people. Everything else was relative to that, including Jesus' freedom to break the law when it was breaking the backs and the spirits of people.

The rule of the Sabbath said that you should do no work. Jesus instead allowed his disciples to pick the grain in the fields rather than see them go hungry. The rule of the Sabbath said there should be no healing. Jesus restored the use of the man's hand rather than turn him away. And in this we are given another example of God's priorities, love and action rather than following a rule that leaves people hungry or suffering. In the gospel, Jesus demonstrates that the only rule that matters, the only rule that may not be bent or broken is the requirement that we love and care for each other. It's the only thing that matters.

The news has been filled this week with commentary about who said what, the words they used and what consequences have been levied. Regardless of how you feel about the politics of either Roseanne Barr or Samantha Bee, and regardless of how you feel about what did or didn't happen to them as a result. I think it's important to hold one key difference in mind. Ms Bee may have used offensive language to describe another person's actions, and I agree that may have shown poor judgment, but I truly believe she spoke from a heart filled with frustration rather than hate. But Ms Barr used her words intentionally to BE offensive, to demean another person, to build barriers rather than work for change. In my opinion at least, and I stress that it is only my opinion, Sam Bee broke the norms because she saw that the people's spirits were being broken and she needed to attract attention to that and God bless her for having a caring heart.

Let's not be done with talking about Bishop Curry yet. Let's listen to what he was saying in that sermon that made so many people uncomfortable enough that they were squirming in their seats and looking away. He said this:

"Imagine our homes and families when this way of love is the way. Imagine our neighborhoods and communities when love is the way. Imagine our governments and nations when love is the way. Imagine business and commerce when this love is the way. Imagine this tired old world when love is the way. No child would go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields down by the riverside to study war no more. When love is the way, there's plenty good room — plenty good room — for all of God's children. When love is the way, we actually treat each other like we are actually family. When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all. We are brothers and sisters, children of God. Brothers and sisters: that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family."

Radical, isn't it? Downright rule-breaking!

Amen.