

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
"Power Outage"
Luke 6:6-16
February 5, 2017

Jessi could tell you lots of stories about how good I am at not noticing the small details around the house. Cabinet doors get left open. Coffee cups get lost in some random place in our house. I'll clean up the dishes and do them all but one or two that I will leave sitting there.

I've even been known to put the milk in the cereal cabinet and the cereal in the fridge.

So I guess it's not all that surprising that I was working upstairs in my study for about an hour Thursday morning before I realized... that there was no electricity in the whole building.

You think I would have noticed that the electricity was off... when there were no lights on... or when I plugged in the computer and it didn't charge, or even by the fact that it was a little cold in the house that day.

But no. I was oblivious.

It's funny how that can start to happen to you,
and you're completely unaware,
distracted as you are, by all the things you're so focused on already because they are big important things, things that need your attention.

But you're missing ***the essential thing***.

You're missing the fact that you're in a power outage
and your interior world has gone dark
and the rooms within you are getting cold.

And so you keep working and acting as if everything is normal....

It can be a dangerous thing to do because you're likely to end up betraying the very things you've been so focused on in the first place.

That's what seems to be happening in this portion of Luke today. And it happens in a couple of different kinds of ways.

First we have the story about the man whose withered hand Jesus heals on the Sabbath. And it's one of those moments where yes, Jesus is teaching us about the Sabbath. In fact, he's reclaiming it.

But this story is about more than just the Sabbath. It's about the ways we can start to betray our faith in God even as we're practicing our faith in God, when we're in the midst of a power outage.

To catch all that it's helpful to remember
what the Sabbath was **for** in the first place.

In the Old Testament there are two basic reasons given for keeping Sabbath. The first was rooted in the story of creation. God created for six days and on the seventh God rested.

But the Rabbis point out that the seventh day was also part of the creation process. "On the seventh day, God finished the work..." Genesis says "On *the seventh day*, God finished the work that he had done."

In other words, God doesn't finish on the sixth day and then just checked out on the seventh. No, the seventh day is when creation is finished.

Which is to say rest and restoration is an essential part of the creation rhythm. It isn't an afterthought. It's part of it. God didn't create and then rest. Nope. ***He finished the creation in the resting itself.***

So Sabbath is one of the ways we participate in the work of the creating God. It's part of how we participate in the life-giving rhythms of God. Resting and worshiping are part of creating. They're part of life-giving.

But the Pharisees have lost sight of the "life-giving" nature of the Sabbath.

They've gotten so caught up in the "**shoulds and oughts**" of Sabbath keeping, in the "**shoulds and oughts**" of being God's people that they are destroying the very thing they are trying to protect.

[slow]

It's such a common tendency in the life of any religion, including our own. All of us, every last one of us, have moments when we get stuck there.

We have ***expectations*** and ***convictions*** about what a Christian should be like,
or what a Christian should be doing,
and we're ready to pounce on anyone who doesn't live up to them.

In fact, we can get so caught up in our own convictions about "should and oughts," that we don't realize our interior house... is growing cold. We're so passionate about our own convictions we don't recognize we're in the midst of a power outage.

And when that happens we can't tell the difference between ***God's righteousness***,
and [what is really] our own ***self righteousness***.

That's a dangerous place to be.

Because our deep convictions... can begin to do more to create death than life.

It's a trap all of us can fall into.

A trap Jesus is exposing in his Sabbath healing.

But that's not the only thing wrapped up in this Sabbath healing. There was another reason the Old Testament gives for practicing Sabbath... and Jesus is reclaiming that too.

Deuteronomy says we are to keep the Sabbath "**Because we were once slaves in Egypt.**" In other words, Sabbath is supposed to keep us from becoming enslaved to the machine of our economy.

It reminds us that we are more than bricklayers.

Human beings are more than our productivity.

Sabbath reminds us that you... and me... and every human life
is sacred in the eyes of God.

In other words, Sabbath... is about human dignity...

And Deuteronomy says ***it is for everyone***. It's not just for you.

The Sabbath was also for your children and for your slaves and for your animals and yes...
Deuteronomy says, for the immigrants in your community... so that they can all have a day of rest...
because for ***God... every life matters!***

All lives are sacred!

***God would not allow God's people to reduce anyone's life...
to an economic calculation.***

You see Sabbath was a justice issue.
It was the first labor law on the books.

But the Pharisees, they've forgotten that. Or at least they're not too concerned about that right now. They are focused on getting the particulars of God's laws right... and they're feeling a little threatened by Jesus.

They are certainly not worried about that man.... with the withered hand. As far as they were concerned he was not the issue right now.

After all he was pretty useless, his withered hand and all.

He's kind of a drain on the society.

Don't let him be a drain on their religion too.

Besides, it's not like he had to get healed today, right? He ***could wait*** awhile... while they figure things out... He could wait to be healed. It didn't have to happen today. What was important today was to get the Sabbath rules right.

Again they were so focused on their details, they had no idea they were in a blackout. But Jesus... Jesus turns on the light... and reveals just how dark things had gotten.

Remember the Sabbath because you were once slaves...

Remember the Sabbath... so you don't forget that all life is sacred... even those you think you don't have any use for.

Apparently the Pharisees were so busy "***practicing***" the Sabbath they had stopped "***remembering***" the Sabbath.

It's easy to do... especially when we're distracted and disconnected. We think we're just being faithful, doing our spiritual thing... but we don't realize that the power is off...

And all our spiritual practices, and all our devotion to our faith
are doing more to keep us blind
than to help us to see.

[pause]

You see, in this Sabbath healing Jesus is exposing another one of the great ***temptations***, the great ***betrayals*** that happen so easily in the life of any religion....

It's the betrayal of separating our devotion to God
from God's devotion to the world.

But Jesus won't let us do that.

God will not let us separate out the sacred from the secular.

As far as God is concerned, the entire world is sacred.

So we don't get to cloister our pious practices,
our devotion to our faith,
and keep it separate from God's great concern for human dignity,
God's great concern for the value of **every human life**. We don't get to separate the two,
but sometimes we start to and don't even realize it.

Well, there was one other portion of our scripture reading today that I haven't mentioned, and that was the last part about the twelve disciples. It seems a little disconnected at first, I know.

But it's not. You may have noticed that it ends rather ominously, reminding us that even one of Jesus' closest disciples will betray him.

It's almost like this subtle little footnote. Or like Luke is winking at us... saying, "It wasn't just the Pharisees that ended up betraying what God was doing."

It happened to one of the twelve.

It could happen to you too,
but it doesn't have to.

You see between the Sabbath controversy and the reminder of Judas' betrayal, we have this one little verse where Jesus models a different kind of attention...

Luke, ever so artfully, inserts one verse... to help to keep the house warm and the lights on and to notice the **essential things**.

"Now during those days," it says in verse 12, "Jesus went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God."

You see, Jesus understood just how easy it is to get distracted... to be about the work of your life, and have no idea the power is off.

...To be thinking you're following God, but end up betraying God.
Jesus understood how easily this happens.

And so he withdraws to the mountain to pray. And not just once. Did you catch that? "Now during those days," Luke writes. It was part of his practice.

It's the way he stays centered.

It's the way he stays connected to the source and power of his life's work.

It's the way he is able to

**hold together both great courage and great love,
to hold together both deep conviction and profound grace.**

It's the way he's able to hold together his devotion to the Father and the Father's devotion to the world. And we know just how important that will become for Jesus...He wrestles with God and God's love for the world in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's the way he becomes God's love for the world. Jesus in those days went to the mountain to pray.

And it's that way for us too.

If we want the interior house to stay warm
and the light within to shine to the world,
then we have to keep coming back to the mountain of God,
to be centered,
to remain connected.

It's the only way we will notice
if the power is on or off.

Let's pray:

O God, we are so easily distracted most of the time.

We confess that we can be driven by our own deep convictions
and lose sight of your love.

We confess that sometimes we don't know how to live out your love for the world. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us.

Keep our hearts open to you.

Help us to see the world with your eyes
and to see one another with your love.

Help us to find a rhythm in these days,
to remain centered in you.

We ask these things, in the name of the One who taught us to pray, saying...

Our Father...