

Homily for Thursday in the Seventh Week after Pentecost

July 16, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 10: Isaiah 26:7–9, 12, 16–19; Psalm 102:13–17; Matthew 12:1–14**

Today’s gospel lesson from Matthew is only heard at this daily Eucharist, every other year, when a commemoration doesn’t take precedence. The parallel passages from Mark and Luke are also heard at daily Eucharists. Of course, all of these lessons are read one way or another at Daily Morning and Evening Prayer. That said, one might say concerning the narratives of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, this is the moment when the Pharisees in Mark and Matthew decide to destroy Jesus and in Luke “[the Pharisees] were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.”¹

The Pharisees heard Jesus address them with words are drawn from the prophet Hosea, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.”²

When Matthew writes in the last decades of the first century of the Christian Era, all that remains of the

¹ Luke 6:11.

² Hosea 6:6.

Jerusalem that Jesus knew were three wall towers. The temple, the walls, the city, and its people are gone. Matthew's Jewish Christian community doesn't depend on the temple's worship as the foundation of the law. Again, drawing from Hosea, Jesus insists that mercy and love are the foundations of righteousness.

It's the sabbath day, not only are Jesus' disciples seen by Pharisees plucking grain as they walk, but Jesus is asked in a synagogue by Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?"³ Instead of replying to the Pharisees, he says to the man with a withered hand, " 'Stretch out your hand.' And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, whole like the other."⁴

I've learned from my Trinidadian friends many different English expressions. If your foot is sore, one can say, "My foot is ready to ring out." They also have an interesting use for the word "stubborn"—it means "hardened." The Pharisees were "hardened" against Jesus. Yet things commanded by the law even in Jesus' day, such as circumcision on the eighth day, were not

³ Matthew 12:10.

⁴ Matthew 12:13.

considered to be a breaking of the sabbath. Plucking grain to abate real hunger got a pass too.⁵ The real problem was that the Pharisees did not have hearts open to the possibility that God was at work among them. Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, not to mention the rest of the New Testament, was born in the time of persecution. May those who suffer in our own time be few.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 181 n.29, n.30, n.32, n.36.