

“Fundamentalism of Love”

Mark 2:23-3:6

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Wesley Taylor says, “The world's greatest fundamentalists -- are fishermen and golfers. A fellow had been away fishing all day and had no luck. Not wanting to go home skunked, he stopped off at a local fish shop and asked the storekeeper to pick out three of the largest trout that he had. "Shall I wrap them for you?" asked the shopkeeper. "No," replied the fisherman. "I'll stand here by the door, and you throw them to me from behind the counter." "Why in the world do you want me to throw them to you?" asked the shopkeeper. "Well," said the fisherman, "I've been fishing all day, and I haven't caught a thing. Now I may not be a good fisherman, but I'm a worse liar. And when I get home, my wife and kids are going to ask me if I caught anything . . . and I want to be able to tell them the truth."

We are all fundamentalists about something. Jesus was a "Love Fundamentalist."

Many of us are fundamentalists about fundamentalism. We are either fundamentally against it or fundamentally for it. But contrary to what some of us may think, "fundamentalism" isn't the private domain of one group of people. "Fundamentalists" can be found in all walks of life. The jogger going out at 5:30 a.m. on a dark, blustery, blizzardy morning is a fundamentalist about her exercise regime. The carpenter whose workshop looks like a display ad is a fundamentalist about the location of each and every one of his tools. The 6-year-old who makes his parents pick off every single one of those tiny dehydrated onion squares from his Happy Meal burger is a fundamentalist about his food. The office manager whose weekly staff meetings always take exactly the same form, no matter what crisis is surging through the office, or who insists that everything that takes place be "according to plan" or "according to Robert's Rules of Order" is a procedural fundamentalist. The strict party-liners who would never consider voting for a candidate not run by their party are political fundamentalists. The parents who insist that their children be instructed in "the three Rs" and nothing else may be called educational fundamentalists. And there are countless other kinds of "fundamentalists" as well. Monday Night Football fundamentalists, the toilet-paper-rolls-under vs. the toilet-paper-rolls-over-fundamentalists, No-nuts-in-fudge, Christmas presents opened on Christmas Eve, no white shoes after Labor Day fundamentalists.

Even within the defined domain of "religious fundamentalism" there are many varieties. Summer is a challenging time for some of us because we have organ, praise band, sanctuary, Meisenheimer Hall, order of worship, New Revised Standard Version fundamentalist.

All of us are fundamentalists about something. We all choose to erect certain foundational pillars that we use to support the weight of other attitudes and actions called for in our lives. Being a "fundamentalist" about some things can strengthen our centeredness and build up our sense of security for the marginality that is required of disciples of Jesus. Fundamentalism only becomes a problem when those rocks of certainty we have placed in our lives harden to immovability hindering the compassionate love of our hearts.

Mark's gospel pinpoints this problem in the second episode of today's text. Even as Jesus is moved to compassion by the sight of the man with the withered hand, Jesus is was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Jesus and the bystanders in the synagogue that day were butting head-on into each other's fundamentalisms. For the Pharisees, abiding by the strict letter of the law concerning correct Sabbath observation was the fundamentalism shaping their attitude. Like the Pharisees from the first episode of today's text, these synagogue observers believed that safeguarding Sabbath observation was more important than the individual situations that they found themselves confronting.

In both these cases, however, Jesus also acts as a fundamentalist. But here, as everywhere else in the gospel stories, Jesus' actions and attitudes are defined by his fundamentalism of love. In everything Jesus did, in everything he said, Jesus acted out this love fundamentalism. It was love fundamentalism that urged Jesus to heal the man's withered hand on a Sabbath, that kept Jesus from temptations in the wilderness and spurred Jesus to sweep the children up into his arms. It was love fundamentalism that drove Jesus to choose service over

political power and that revealed Jesus' glorification through self-sacrifice. It was love fundamentalism that move Jesus to accept dinner invitations with all sorts of outcasts and forgive all people.

Douglas John Hall says that the law requires us to tolerate one another. But the law of Christ makes tolerance not enough. "It may be good enough, legally and politically, for the pluralistic society; but it is not good enough for Jesus who did not say, 'Tolerate your neighbor,' but 'Love your neighbor'."

The great thing about being a love fundamentalist is that the more strictly you abide by your fundamentalism, the greater your freedom. Instead of narrowing your vision, limiting your options or scaling down your scope, love fundamentalism opens whole new worlds of possibilities and promise. The fundamentalism of love always offers one more chance, always goes one more mile, always trusts one more time, always believes one more possibility, always commits one more hour, always cries one more tear, always rejoices over one more soul.

But like all fundamentalisms, love fundamentalism depends on rigorous commitment, perpetual practice and overarching obedience in order for it to truly define the depth and direction of our lives. If love is not woven within every fiber of our life, then love is not a fundamental part of our being. Jesus chose to weave the thread of love throughout every aspect of his existence. The very fiber of his soul was knit together with this love. Will we choose to do the same?

Mark 2:23-3:6 NLT One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?" Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was high priest) and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!" Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him. Jesus looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.

Jesus did not question the sacredness of Sabbath observance or reject these inherited laws, but rather brought them to fulfillment. When the laws promoted love of God and love of everyone, Jesus encouraged their observance. But when these same laws intruded on loving God and others, Jesus denounced them. People and their needs are much more important to God than rules. Whenever a rule develops a life of its own dividing people then that rule needs to be returned to its true purpose, which is to grow love.

Jesus was saddened by their hard hearts. How is your heart hard? God created us to have preferences, to enjoy different facets of creation, however we are never to judge, look down upon, or criticize someone who enjoys a different facet. Broccoli lovers are to love beet lovers. Nature lovers are to love video game lovers. Metallic lovers are to love Blake Shelton lovers. Sanctuary lovers are to love Meisenheimer Hall lovers. Hymn lovers are to love praise song lovers. Viking lovers are to love Packer lovers.

How is your heart hard? Are there certain people who get under your skin? If you are a highly organized, efficient person then perhaps a person ahead of you in line with coupons, searching for their credit card, slowly bagging their groceries. If you drive a Prius, then perhaps a Hummer who cuts you off. If you are a republican, then perhaps a democrat. Grow your love for them.

How is your heart hard? Is there a person who has hurt you that you have not forgiven? Is there a person who lives a different lifestyle that you struggle to love? Is there a rule, or moral or ethic that you believe all people should live and when someone doesn't live it then your heart becomes hard, judgmental, disapproving of them? Madeleine L'Engle said, "What is there that makes Christians feel that hate can express the love of Jesus?" We need to be careful that our preference for a certain way of life does not create hate for other ways of life. Be a love fundamentalist. Love all people. Show your love by listening, laughing, eating with everyone.

Madeleine L'Engle said, "I think of myself as a fundamentalist, that is, someone who still cares about fundamental things, like truth, friends, imagination, story, honor, compassion and love." Bill Wilson said, "The days of religious rhetoric are over. People have to see the reality of the gospel. And we are the only Jesus they will see, folks." Bobby Conway said. "You are the fifth gospel."

How is our culture's heart hard? Does our culture value some people more than others? Perhaps professional athletes, actors, the rich, married people with children, people with a certain Body Mass Index? How will we love all people? How will we confront biases with love that will encourage everyone to love everyone?

How is our political heart hard? Are we treating all races equal? Do we care equally for the poor, middle class and rich? Are we welcoming immigrants as we welcome citizens? Do we show a preference to certain lifestyles or identities? Are we giving equal access to education, employment, housing and health care to all? Do we honor and respect people in other countries as much as we honor and respect people in our country? Do we give preference to certain people who live a certain way, believe certain things and fit a certain template? How will we, as a country love everyone equally?

David Vryhof said, "The gospels are full of stories where Jesus ignores the boundaries imposed by acceptable religious, political and social practice, and openly disregards human-made laws and regulations in order to show compassion. Jesus consistently lets sinners and outcasts know that they are wanted and loved by God, even if they are despised by everyone else."

Be a love fundamentalist. Strive to have every thought for yourself and every person be a loving thought. When negative, biases, judgmental, fearful, hateful thoughts pop into your mind. Acknowledge that thought, then place it aside, perhaps visualize handing it to Jesus, then replace it with a loving thought and reinforce your loving thought with a loving action. Strive to be more like Jesus the ultimate love fundamentalist. Amen