



February 2 – The Great One, Pastor Mike

What made Wayne Gretzky so good at hockey? How was he able to set all of those records, some of which remain today? Some argue it was his vision. He was able to see the ice and movement better than others. Some say it was his agility and versatility. Others talk about his memory. While others talk about his intellect and study of the game. In the documentary “In Search of Greatness” all of these possibilities are explored. One other immersed. He approached the game like a child. In a time when hockey was heavily influenced by structure and predictability, he played with childlike freedom. In a time driven by drills and practice, Gretzky spent time in unstructured play. This gave him a flexibility that others did not have. He could move within the game in ways that were not imagined by others. This is not because the rules prevented it. It is because the current practice had turned into something different.

What we see in this text is something similar. God laid out rules with Moses and others. The one in question today is “Remember the Sabbath.” The Sabbath was a gift to the people. It was a time of rest and centering. After being enslaved for generations, the Israelites were not only freed from Egypt, but they were also commanded to rest. This rest was with a purpose, to rest, recover, and re-center. The Sabbath was designed to draw people closer to God. Over time, the way that we practice our faith starts to muddy the intent of the command. By the time Jesus is walking with his disciples, there is a lengthy list of things you cannot do and a feverish demand to obey these new rules perfectly.

It is a lot like Lenten traditions. The season is centered on repentance, an intentional turning toward God. The practice, over time, turned into the annual question “What are you going to give up for Lent?” There is nothing bad about giving up something. It also is not connected to the original meaning of Lent. It has changed. It only becomes a problem when our focus is on what we should give up, and our focus remains on that for the season of Lent. Our focus turns inward instead of being focused on God.

What Jesus does in this text is to bring that childlike mindset. In what world could it possibly be bad to eat when hungry or help if able? There is a view of the situation that is pure and unfettered by the structure of modern practice. This way of thinking is unimaginable and even offensive to many. There are rules. There are proper ways to live out your faith and to prove to God you care. Yet, how could anyone who is a follower of Yahweh feel that it is best to neglect someone in need or to prepare when hungry because of what day it is.

Back to Gretzky...his love of unstructured play set him free to see the game in a new way. This allowed him to pivot and respond with astounding agility, not because he was that much faster than everyone else, it is because he was not bound by his thinking. You may have heard someone say “I’m spiritual, not religious.” To me, this is the church equivalent of someone feeling bored, or worse, abused, by a system that often centers around rules and structure.

I compare the modern church to the followers of Jesus and the difference is quite striking. We place our gatherings on a calendar, start on time, sing a specified number of hymns, end on time (mostly) and then go about our day. If you are anything like me, the rest of your Sunday has a “to do” list. We cook on the Sabbath; we serve on the Sabbath. We have swung to the other end of that spectrum. We have moved away from those rules, only to replace them with other practices.

Then I think about Jesus moving about with the rag-tag group of disciples. They moved about freely, traveling to where the needs were. They did not have a building, a tent, a time for worship, a set schedule. They were free to pivot and adapt as needed. It is the same love of God. It is the same faith. In Jesus, they were freed from the structure and able to meet people where they were. There will always be gravity pulling us back to tradition and structure, may we never lose that childlike view of the world, and find unfettered ways to share God’s love. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt