

"Above and Beyond"

Text: Mark 2:23-3:6

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder. May the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude. And may the occupation of your heart by God the Holy Spirit fill you with comfort, confidence, and joy. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, when we hear "above and beyond" we almost always hear it as a positive, complimentary phrase. Someone who goes "above and beyond" typically did more than was expected, to their credit and praise. A child who was told to clean his room and ended up cleaning also the rest of the house is lavished with praise for "going above and beyond." That praise pretty much translates to every walk of life where someone does more than was expected. Soldiers are awarded medals for going above and beyond the call of duty, employees are given raises and promoted, police and firemen are lauded as heroes.

The result is that we are conditioned to imagine that going above and beyond is always a good thing. It is not, and at times the damage is significant, as our text for this morning will demonstrate. That section of God's Word that will guide and instruct us is found in Mark's Gospel, the 2nd Chapter, beginning with Verse 23:

ESV (Mark 2:23-3:6) One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." **ESV Mark 3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴ And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went**

out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

This is God's Word. Acknowledging the divine origin of these words and asking our God to bless us through their study, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth. Amen."**

The basic problem with "above and beyond" is that sooner or later it crosses over into "too much." It violates other maxims like "less is more." It puts me in mind of a church workday where we were loading a pile of old brick into an even older pickup. We had the bed squatted right down on the frame but with every additional brick we piled on, the owner would say, *"She took that, she'll take one more."* He said it facetiously, of course, knowing full well that that sort of logic will eventually end in disaster. There will finally be a straw that breaks the camel's back.

Yet the problem with "above and beyond" doesn't only manifest itself in disaster. It can be just too much of a good thing – like the weekend church outing where each family agreed to provide everything for one of the evening meals. Though not her turn, one of the other wives went "above and beyond" and brought a dessert for the other family's meal. The result was two desserts and one insulted wife.

Usually, it's pretty easy to identify when "above and beyond" crosses over into "too much" – as when, unasked, a mother-in-law takes it upon herself to clean here daughter-in-law's house. Yet sometimes that line is crossed unnoticed and unchallenged, and the damage can be anything from an annoyance to a catastrophe. Neither Christians nor Christian churches are immune.

To illustrate the problem, we'll start small and work our way up. A church member, by way of encouragement, tells the pastor that she is really enjoying his Sunday sermons. Duly encouraged, the pastor decides to go "above and beyond" and doubles the length of his sermons. No further compliments ensue. It's the same sort of reasoning that assumes that if a congregation enjoys singing four stanzas of a hymn, they will gladly go above and beyond by singing 14.

Obviously this is just the relatively small stuff. It gets immeasurable more serious at the point where "above and beyond" meets doctrine. The Bible, for example, condemns drunkenness. "Above and beyond" condemns that which God did not by prohibiting the consumption of any and all alcohol. The Bible condemns abortion. "Above and beyond"

condemns any and every means of limiting the number of children you produce.

Which brings us finally to the problem identified in our text for this morning. The Pharisees were the apex offenders when it came to going above and beyond what God had actually commanded in his Word. They prided themselves on their extra measure of “righteousness.” Recall how the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable proudly recited his extra measure of “above and beyond”: **‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’** ^{ESV}(Luke 18:11-12) The Jews were required to fast only once each week, and were commanded to donate 10% on only some of their income. He was therefore saying, “*You commanded one thing, but I want to make sure you notice that I go above and beyond.*” The result, as Jesus himself pointed out, was that the Pharisees were **“*straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.*”**

In our text the Pharisees first condemned Jesus’ disciples *not* for picking grain as they walked (which the Mosaic Law allowed – Deuteronomy 23:25) but for doing so on the Sabbath. They also therefore condemned Jesus for not controlling his men. The parallel account of this event in Matthew 12 tells us that the disciples did so because they were hungry, which is undoubtedly why Jesus brought up the example of what David and his men did when they were hungry – eating (without condemnation) the bread in the tabernacle that was normally forbidden to them. Their second accusation was solely against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Again, nothing in God’s Word prohibited healing on the Sabbath. The only prohibition came from the Pharisee’s *above and beyond*.

Don’t miss the drama of the confrontation that unfolds in this text. The Pharisees stood watching, judging, as Jesus called the man with the withered hand to his side. Jesus then asks them this question, which clearly set the stage for what he was about to do: **“*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?*”** **But they were silent.** Feel the silence and the tension in the synagogue build as Jesus **looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand...”** Hear the sudden intake of breath from all as the man stretched out his hand and revealed that it was restored to perfect health. Yet note also the mastery of Jesus in deftly avoiding their condemnation. Neither in our text nor in the parallel account in Matthew 12 are we told that Jesus did anything but command the man to stretch out his hand. We are told of no contact with Jesus. No command **“Be healed.”** No saliva or mud or sigh. With what then could the Pharisees condemn him? Of what could they accuse him?

The man was obviously healed, but how? What eye-witness evidence could they bring? What testimony? The Great Master accomplished his will before their very eyes and yet gave them nothing by which he accused or condemned. How they must have seethed with frustrated rage, even to the point that they conspired with their enemies, the Herodians, on how they might join forces to destroy Jesus. The Herodians were those who supported the rule of King Herod, and therefore subservience to the Roman government – something that was loathsome to the Pharisees.

Their hatred of Jesus had blinded them to the invaluable truths that Jesus had communicated to them. The first: **“*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*”** And then his powerful, **“*So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.*”** By the first Jesus taught them that their entire religion was backwards. By the second, that the One to whom they were ultimately accountable was standing right there in front of them. Jesus, as true God, represented the origin and ultimate authority of the law. If, in other words, the God who established the law told them that what he was doing was not in violation of his own law, it is the height of arrogance for any man to pretend to know better.

Yet this is exactly the core cause and root problem whenever man determines to go above and beyond what God himself established in his Word. It is man attempting to be even more righteous than God demands. It is man casting himself as even more virtuous than the standard God established. It is the pride of work-righteousness in action. **“*God, I thank you that I am not like other men.*”**

Even devout Christians can begin to wonder if they are sinning by failing to keep the Jewish Sabbath by not worshipping and abstaining from all work on Saturdays. This too is a misguided application of above and beyond. God’s Word not only never demanded the Saturday Sabbath observance of non-Jews, God in his Word released *all* New Testament Christians from observing the Jewish Sabbath when Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16-17: **“*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*”**

It is, in fact, absolutely critical that God’s children turn daily to his Word, and to be guided and instructed neither by what we *think* God said nor by what we feel he *should have said*, but only by what he actually there communicated to us. There we will find the amazing truth that there

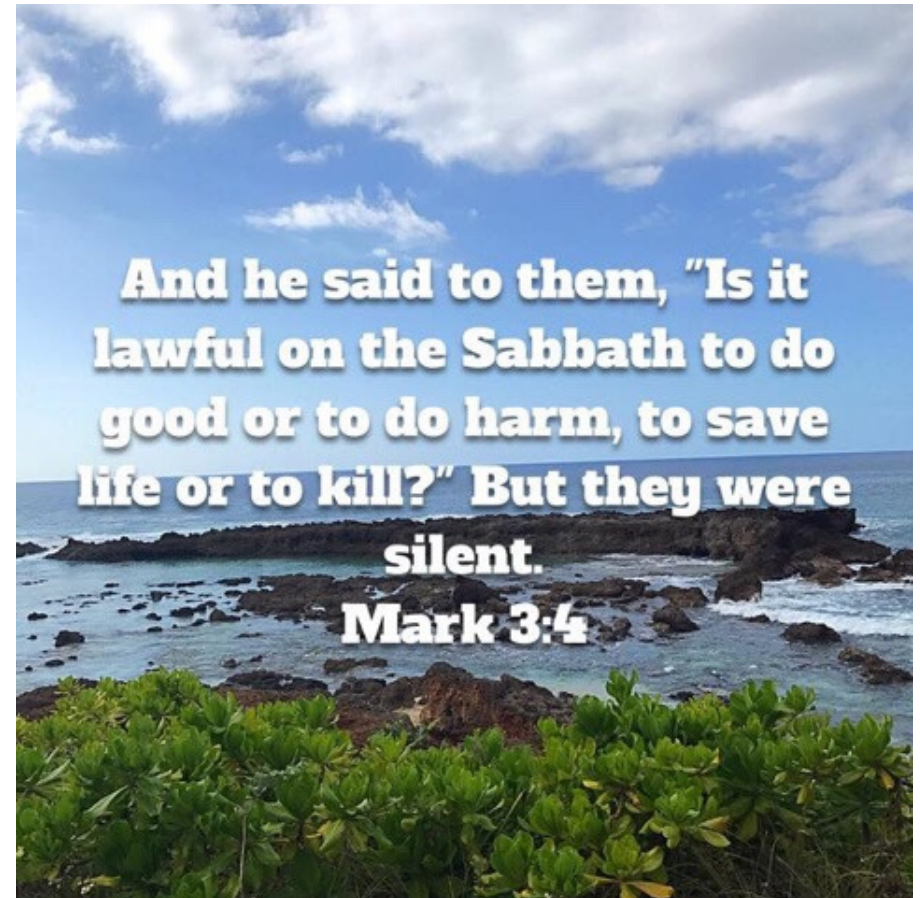
really is only one individual in the entire history of earth that truly went above and beyond – our Savior Jesus. Jesus was in no way obligated to do for us what he did. He would have remained perfectly just and righteous had he opted to allow every human being to reap the just reward for the sin that we had sown. No one, from the entire mass of humanity, was worthy. No one was deserving. Jesus owed no one anything at all. And still he went immeasurably above and beyond. Immeasurably because human intellect can't even begin to calculate or quantify the difference between the perfect heaven that Jesus left and the filthy world he entered.

This is the truth by which you and I are saved. We cannot earn God's love and forgiveness by our works. Our only hope – God's own plan for our salvation – is to trust in the goodness of Jesus Christ. Shelter daily in that precious Word of God, recognizing that there is nothing "above and beyond" that Word of truth. Except, of course, the heaven that Jesus has earned for us, and which he, amazingly enough, longs to share with us. Amen.

ESV(Deuteronomy 5:12-15) "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

ESV(Colossians 2:13-17) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

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The Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 2, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn 44 (Red Hymnal)

"Ye Lands, to the Lord, Make a Jubilant Noise"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) Our three readings this morning are tied together by the common thread of the Jewish Sabbath. That this command was intended for the Jews is reinforced by the fact that nowhere in the Old Testament were Gentiles (non-Jews) commanded to keep the Jewish Saturday Sabbath. Our first lesson contains further evidence in that the Jews were commanded to remember their release from Egyptian bondage on the Sabbath. Only Jews, not Gentiles, were enslaved and later released in Egypt.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Page 38)

The Second Lesson: (Colossians 2:13-17) Our second reading represents God's release of all New Testament Christians from the Jewish Sabbath regulations. Like all Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws, the festivals (annual), new moon celebrations (monthly) and Sabbath observances (weekly) pointed ahead to and were rendered obsolete by the coming of the Promised Messiah. They were "a shadow" of the coming Christ and their significance ended at his arrival.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 765 (Brown Hymnal)

"Christ High-Ascended"

The Sermon – Mark 2:23-3:6 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Above and Beyond"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 740 (Stanzas 1-2) (Brown Hymnal)

"Holy Spirit, End Our Sadness"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 740 (Stanza 3) (Brown Hymnal)

"Holy Spirit, End Our Sadness"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (20) Average (42)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. Mr. Mark Wales has accepted the teaching call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Grace of Sleepy Eye has called Pastor Sam Rodebaugh. Mr. Darin Lau is considering the teaching call to Messiah of Eau Claire.

Confirmation Sunday and June Communion Schedule –

Confirmation Sunday is scheduled for June 16. Since we historically have celebrated Holy Communion on Confirmation Sunday, and because the CLC Convention later this month will require Pastor Roehl to be gone on the 4th Sunday of the month, Holy Communion will be celebrated in June on the 16th and 30th.

West Central Delegate Conference Papers – Copies of the papers delivered at the recent West Central Delegate Conference in Valentine are available from our two Delegates, Mark and Mick Johnson, or from Pastor Roehl.

Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest Renewal – Subscriptions for both the Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest are now due. See the sign-up sheets on the mailbox table for more information. Please consider subscribing to either or both.