

“Responsibly-ness or Responsiveness?”

Mark 3: 1-10

Sunday September 2, 2018

I recently read a novel by Anne Perry about a niece who is called to go from England to Ireland to be with her dying Aunt in her last days. The priest of the area took her in a horse and buggy to this little rural village that is his parish. The year is 1896. As the novel evolves you are let in on a secret. A murder of long ago still haunts the small village. One in their midst is the murderer. Slowly the people are moving away. The priest of the village is distraught over the fact that no one has confessed to the murder. He feels so responsible for the souls of this parish. He does not want anyone to die with unconfessed sin. Do you feel responsible for someone or something? Most of us were raised with the idea that being responsible was a virtue that was absolutely essential. Take men for instance. When a man marries there is an expectation that he is responsible for his family. He is to see to their security. Above all he must keep them safe. Related to that, he must also provide enough resources to see that they have food, clothing, and the necessities of life.

Women have responsibility too. They are responsible for creating a home, caring for the children, and a husband. We are particularly concerned when people don't fulfill these responsibilities we think about our families or other families.

One day, I was confronted this idea that there is responsiveness and there is responsibility-ness. I know that those words sound

so much alike. What is the difference between responsibility and responsiveness.

In terms of bidding a contract responsiveness is submitting a bid that addresses the criteria of the person who wants a job done. In essence, it says if you gave me the job this is how I would respond to the work you want done.

If your bid is accepted then you now are responsible to get it done.

In relationships that is both responsiveness and responsibility-ness. When you feel responsibility for others you tend to try to fix things, protect them, rescue them, and carry their feelings as though they are your own.

What about Jesus? Was He responsible or responsive? Some of you may say both.

I contend that Jesus was responsive. It is the Sabbath day.

People have come to worship God and be reminded how they are to live in this covenant relationship with God.

One of those rules that God established long ago was that the Sabbath was to be kept holy. No work was to be done on the Sabbath. There was a penalty for not keeping the Sabbath. It was death. For centuries since that commandment was given, how to live that out was being defined by the religious leaders. In Jesus' day Rabbis defined for their disciples what that meant to keep the Sabbath. The most conservative Rabbi were the Pharisees. Everything we know about Jesus, He was most closely aligned with the Pharisees theologically. Rabbis policed each other and everyone else in order to keep someone from breaking the rules.

This episode in which Jesus is at the Synagogue raises a question about what could be done on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to the man who had lived with a withered hand. He did not touch him. He asked the man to come forward and said to the man to stretch forth his hand. Healing happened. Jesus responded to a situation and need with compassion for a man who had lived a long time with a hand that did not work. He restored not only the man's hand but his ability to provide for himself and many even for a family. It raised a bigger question for me about God whether we call God Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. Does God take responsibility for the whole human race or parts of it? Or does He act in a responsive manner toward human beings?

As I look at Adam and Eve, I see God being responsive to the first human beings. He put them in a good place, the Garden of Eden. He set up chose making. When they chose wrong, he responded with consequences.

Along the way God called to people to make His plan go. God wanted to provide a way for people to be healed of the brokenness of their souls after sin entered the world. God was responsive, but God was not responsible.

I hear people say why is there evil in the world if there is a God? We have become confused about God. God is not responsible for people. God is responsive to people. That does not mean He waves a magic wand and makes happen what we want or ask for.

Instead, God desires that we be responsive to Him. God wants to create healing and wholeness in your life, my life, and in our world.

Even when I think about God coming to earth in Jesus Christ to die for sins of the whole world, I realize that God is being responsive to the sins of the whole world. This act of dying for sins of the people, provides the opportunity for each human being to receive forgiveness, if they choose so.

Just as Jesus responded to the man with the withered hand out of compassion, so He responds to us out of love.

What does that mean for us? It means that we have a choice about our relationship with our Lord and with His Kingdom here on earth.

Joshua who led the Hebrew people into the Promised Land, found that they were picking up the beliefs of the people who occupied the land. He called the leaders of the Hebrew people together and told them that they had a choice to make. They could be God's people or they could walk away.

Joshua wasn't responsible to those people as their leader, He was responsive to God and to these people.

We as a church here at Trinity are not responsible for this Church. We are to be responsive to our Lord Jesus about this Church. When I say the Church, I mean first of all the people. How would God like me to be responsive to the people here? Second how would He like me to be responsive to the building itself. I have known people who have answered that second question by telling everyone else how to be responsive. That person has not always been the pastor.

Third, how do we be responsive to the Holy Spirit when it comes to people who we are wanting to reach with the Good News of Jesus Christ?