

“You hypocrite!”hypocrite!.....I hate it when someone catches me talking the talk, but not walking the walk. But I think we all do it. And really, what is so bad about encouraging someone to be better than we ourselves are? To urge them to take a higher road than we sometimes are capable of taking. I think it is sometimes part of our job, or am I the only parent who ever threatened a teen age son or daughter if they did something that I myself had done at their age. With age I know how stupid and reckless I was...and I don't want them to face the risks.

No, I don't think hypocrisy of this sort is so bad.....the church has survived it for thousands of years and it is not going to go away and the church will survive my hypocrisy and yours. But this concept of hypocrisy is not what Jesus was talking about. In Jesus time to be a hypocrite was to be one who played the wrong part. I think Jesus would say to us that keeping a Sabbath time is a good thing....then and now. Turn off your computer your cell phone and TV and spend some time with people...spend some time with God. But more importantly Jesus was saying that you don't understand that we are in a new age...an age when the Kingdom of God is at hand...in our midst. And while keeping Sabbath is important, you are missing the larger gift, the greater work.

They saw Jesus healing this bent over insignificant woman. Perhaps they saw the woman as a cripple or as a street person or an addict.....as an “other”perhaps an illegal immigrant.

But what did Jesus call her? A daughter of Abraham! And who were the sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah but the children of God’s ancient promise...the promise that Abraham and Sarah who thought they were barren and were really, really old would have more descendants than there were stars in the sky or grains of sand in the ocean and these descendants would be a blessing to all the world....the greatest descendant and blessing would of course be Jesus the Messiah. But this bent over woman was also to be a blessing. Was she bent over by a physical ailment? By guilt? By the prejudice of others? Who knows? Jesus simply lays hands on her and says, be healed...go be a blessing. The hypocrites were playing the wrong role, they were protecting the law and the tradition but they were missing the greater gift that we are all children of Abraham and called to be a blessing to each other. I say to you ...”Be healed, go be a blessing!”

What threatens the viability and effectiveness of the church is not those of us who sometimes do not practice what we preach but the growing identification of the church as a body that judges, separates, condemns and excludes....a rapidly growing belief especially among the

young. The church is missing the gift...we play the role of judge instead of healer and enabler On our recent trip to France we had two wonderful young women as guides. One French, one Irish, both believers, both Roman Catholics, both would enter churches to pray... but both have stopped attending Mass because the church refuses to see the bent over woman as a Daughter of Abraham. Noted novelist Anne Rice recently announced that she is leaving Christianity for the same reason.....she is leaving the church but not leaving or denying Christ. She is just leaving the judgmental church.

I would disagree with Anne Rice. We cannot leave the church, we need the church but the church will die as we know it but will be reborn and emerge to serve new times. We need the community of church as a place where we and our children learn the greater gift.

Is St. Matthew's a community where everyone who enters will be welcomed as a child of Abraham. Is this a place where those who are bent over by the inevitable pains of life can come and be made whole?

Will you call a new Rector whose focus is on keeping the Sabbath or one who truly believes that the Kingdom of God is in your midst? Will you call a rector who loves the vestments and trappings of the role of priest or one who as Rector will see his or her role as equipping each

of you to fulfill the promise to Abraham that you will be a blessing to all people?