

You may remember from the 1960s the television series about Batman and his sidekick Robin, two heroes always fighting crime and saving the innocent from harm. Whenever a surprising event occurred, Robin used one of 359 variations of the phrase, “Holy Smoke, Batman, what do we do now?” From Holy Hurricane to Holy Catastrophe to Holy Cats, Robin always signaled the approaching danger with his holy warnings.

Using his style of warning, I might say to you this morning, “Holy time warp—today’s scriptures are jumping in time, so hang onto your seats as we travel thousands of years in the past and then forward and backward again.”

To begin our holy time shift, we jump back in time thousands of years to the story from 1 Samuel, when David entered the sacred place of worship in the town of Nob. He surprised Ahimelech, the one in charge of the priests, and I can almost hear Ahimelech saying, “Holy surprise, David, why are you here alone? Why is no one with you?”

David quietly whispered, “I’m here on a secret mission from King Saul. Don’t tell anyone I’m here.” Actually, David was running away from King Saul and was in hiding, but he bluffed his way through and distracted Ahimelech by asking, “By the way, I’m hungry. Do you have anything to eat? How about some bread?”

I imagine Ahimelech replying with the intensity of Robin talking to Batman, “Holy secret mission, David, I had no idea King Saul sent you on a mission. I would be glad to feed you, but I have only holy bread.”

“That will do,” replied David, “and how about a sword as well.”

Ahimelech gave David a sword and some holy bread—bread that was dedicated in the temple and was to be eaten only by the priests.

Now hang onto your seats and jump ahead thousands of years to today. What happened to bread in the temple in David’s day would be like someone last week coming into the church really hungry and eating the communion bread—bread

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that was supposed to be used for worship this morning. Although it's ordinary bread, it's reserved for a sacred and holy event. If the deacons showed up to prepare communion and found the bread missing, they might exclaim, "Holy sacred bread—the communion bread is gone!"

Now jump with me in time again to when Jesus recalled the story about David eating the sacred bread. Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath, on the day of rest when no work was to be done. No fires were to be lit, no cooking, no chores around the house. Jesus and his disciples were hungry, so they began picking grains of wheat, rubbing them together to remove the outer hull, and then eating the nutritious grain inside.

Some religious leaders saw Jesus harvesting the wheat. I imagine them exclaiming as Robin would have to Batman, "Holy harvesting, Jesus and his followers are plucking grain and eating it! That's breaking the holy Sabbath law. Holy law breakers—what are we going to do with them?"

Jesus replied by referring to the story from 1 Samuel, "Really? Didn't you ever read what David and his companions did when they were hungry, how they entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat?"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus made a point of reminding the leaders that human need was more important than a rigid following of the religious laws, and he suggested that even the priests went against the rules at times. Jesus then quoted from the book of Hosea: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," suggesting that God's compassion means more than just following the rules.

Holy rules, disciples—just what does it mean to be holy? Are we supposed to follow all God's rules or not? Is holy bread sacred or just plain bread for hungry stomachs? The Hebrew word translated as holy is קָדוֹשׁ (*qadosh*), meaning sacred or set apart for special use. When God invites us to follow God's ways, we are holy, set apart and distinct from those

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who follow other ways that lead to violence and destruction.

As ordinary bread is set apart for the special purpose of communion, it becomes holy. As God invites you and me to live in ways that create peace, we are holy, set apart for doing God's work in the world.

How many of you have ever thought of yourselves as holy, set apart for doing God's work? I imagine for most of us that sounds like a scary idea, an overwhelming task that we feel unprepared to follow. *Holy* seems to be a word for priests, for sacred objects in a cathedral, but not a word for you and me.

Interestingly, God referred several times to people in the Bible as holy people,<sup>2</sup> as ones God invited to do something special in the world. They had no super powers like superheroes. They were not perfect, for they often messed up and got confused. They weren't better than anyone else, for they were ordinary people going about their lives. But for some reason, God invited them to be holy,

to be set apart to help God do something special in the world.

That invitation has been extended to you and me—to be holy, to do something special in the world with God by using our talents and skills and passions, by using our labors that we celebrate on this Labor Day weekend to change the world, to improve the lives of those around us.

One prisoner of war decided to make a difference during WWII when he learned that half of the prisoners would be released from a prison camp.

The prisoners were told that at nine o'clock the next morning, a list of names would be posted, and those whose names were listed would be taken to a boat and given their freedom. Those whose names were not on the list would remain in the prison camp. Those to be set free could take with them only one duffel bag.

In that camp were two soldiers who were close friends. They had been together throughout the war and throughout the

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horrible prison camp experience. They had helped each other, encouraged each other, looked out for each other

Sadly, one of their names was on the list, the other was not. One was selected to be set free, the other would be forced to stay behind in prison.

The soldier to be set free went to gather his most prized personal belongings. He placed them in his duffel bag. But then, as he started toward the boat and toward his freedom, he saw his friend, and he realized that his friend had not been selected.

Quickly, the soldier motioned his buddy to follow him. Discreetly, they went behind one of the barracks. The soldier turned his duffel bag upside down and poured out all of his personal possessions onto the ground. He opened the duffel bag wide and told his friend to get into

the bag. He then strenuously lifted the duffel bag onto his back and carried it onto the boat—and to freedom—the most important, the most precious, the most valuable thing in his life: his friend!<sup>3</sup>

That was a holy moment—when a chance to escape turned into an opportunity to rescue his friend. In a similar way, God has invited each of us to walk to freedom, and in choosing us and setting us apart, God has made you and me holy. Whether we live in large houses or live on the streets, whether we have advanced degrees or a GED, whether we're black or white, whether we've made small mistakes or really messed up our lives, God has chosen you and me to be holy. Now that you know you are holy, how might you make a difference in the world? Holy chosenness, Batman, God has chosen us. We can make a difference. We are holy!

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<sup>3</sup> James Moore, *Some Folks Feel the Rain: Others Just Get Wet*, 86-7.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 12:3-4, *The Message Bible*

<sup>2</sup> See Exodus 19:6 and Leviticus 19:2.