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## Stories of Solidarity :: Predictable

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by michael j. kimpan

Jesus was so predictable.

It was the Sabbath and the Teacher seemed to once again be wandering aimlessly through the grain fields just outside of the city. His disciples knew the reason - he was taking the shortcut, off the beaten path, avoiding the crowds on their way to the local synagogue for worship. The movements of their legs brushing against the stalk of grain as they cut through the field created a kind of rhythmic tune in the cool spring air. *WHOOSH. WHOOSH. WHOOSH.* Each step inched them closer, slowly, to their weekly gathering and time of study and celebration.

But as usual, even before they'd arrived at their destination, 'the synagogue' had already come to them.

*'Aha! Your disciples are breaking the Sabbath laws!'*

Peter rolled his eyes. John rolled up his sleeves and gave his brother that *'let's-call-fire-down-from-heaven-on-these-Pharisee-mongrels'* wink. These teachers of the Law were standing at the edge of the field, and had been watching them. Watching Jesus.

Andrew cracked the morsel of bulgur grain in between his clenched teeth. He and Matthew had slept through breakfast earlier that morning and were hungry. The two of them had been picking at the heads of grain along the way to the house of worship, and were enjoying the freedom provided by this Rabbi. 'Sabbath snacks' were becoming a weekly tradition.

*'Picking grain is work and work on the Sabbath forbidden in the Torah!'*

Peter again rolled his eyes, this time with a little more emphasis.

He hoped the religious leaders would notice. He'd been itching to smack one of them for as long as he could remember. One of the younger teachers of the Law quickly pulled out a scroll he had been carrying for such an occasion, searching feverishly for the citation near the middle of the exodus story. It was one of the 'Big Ten.'

Everyone of them in the field knew it by heart, but there was a little added 'GOTCHA!' factor when one could point to the parchment and prove themselves right.

Jesus responded graciously. He was so predictable.

*'Remember David and his friends, when they entered my Father's house? They ate the holy bread of the priests, which was unlawful. Or here's another example : when priests work on the Sabbath, why aren't they blamed? They are innocent because they're going about the work of my Father.'*

Andrew swallowed, cracking a sly grin. Jesus led the group one stride at a time along the dusty path by the side of the fields as he continued in conversation,

*'There is something bigger than the work of the Temple happening - right here, right now. If you 'teachers' of the Law understood what is meant by the words of the prophet Hosea on behalf of God - "I'm after love that lasts, not more religion" - you wouldn't condemn the innocent. The Sabbath was made for us, not the other way around.'*

The religious leaders continued to watch as Jesus put his arm on Andrew's shoulder and led his disciples into the synagogue. The Pharisees felt like this rag-tag band of disciples were trespassing. This was *their* synagogue.

Jesus entered the room and his eyes immediately scanned the crowd, giving occasion to take notice of a man sitting in solitude. As was his weekly habit, in the middle of the room sat

Benjamin, patiently waiting to worship. He always arrived before anyone else and sat - waiting, and praying.

*Benjamin. 'The son of the right hand.'* The name was fitting - his left had been caught in an olive press some years ago, and had the mangled appearance of a withered prune.

An eerie hush descended upon the room as Jesus took notice of what had been damaged. The Pharisees watched anxiously as Jesus walked up to the misfit. Every Sabbath, week after week, Benjamin showed up expecting a miracle.

Today, they were hoping, was his 'lucky' day.

Jesus was so predictable.

A young scribe broke the silence. This time, he had the parchment at the ready.

*'Thanks for the lesson in the field, O Great Rabbi. But is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'*

Subtle elbows found their ways to the ribs of the elders. This time they'd trap Jesus for certain. If there was one thing this insubordinate healer couldn't turn down, it was an opportunity to restore that which had been ruined.

Jesus muttered some things about a sheep falling into a pit on the Sabbath and then mumbled something about rescuing it out of the mire. He was right, sheep were of high value.

*'How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? This one is made in the image of God, the other is a sign of sacrifice. The Law of the Sabbath is to get in on the good God is up to. Love trumps Law.'*

With that, Jesus fixed his eyes on the withered hand of Benjamin. Slowly, the very eyes of God made their way up to those made of he who was made in God's own image. Locked in intimate eye contact, Jesus spoke to the man.

*'Stretch out your hand.'*