

Our Second Chance God  
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In the game of golf, a truly bad shot, a whack into the water, a slice into the deep woods, a ball that simply disappears into thin air, can be erased by a mulligan. A mulligan is a gift of grace, a second chance, a do-over that is neither earned nor expected. A mulligan makes it possible for a player to stay in the game despite having made a terrible mistake.

Unfortunately, conditions of society have forced some groups to do away with mulligan thinking and adopt a “zero tolerance” stance. But sometimes zero tolerance makes zero common sense.

Fourth grader Patrick took some of his favorite Lego toys to school to show off to his buddies. Patrick’s favorite Lego toy was an inch-and-a-half tall policeman figure, armed with his own teeny-tiny gun. That minuscule piece of plastic succeeded in getting Patrick kicked out of school. It seems the zero tolerance policy about bringing weapons on school grounds extended to include that Lego toothpick-sized armament.

A zero tolerance policy is what the synagogue leader was advocating when he became indignant because Jesus healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath. The leader stated, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

Charged with interpreting the Tora, this official couldn’t see beyond the letter of the law. No “work” on the Sabbath meant strict adherence to every stated restriction.

In other words, the synagogue official had come to see the Sabbath as one giant “thou shalt not.” Instead of being a celebration of the divine presence, Shabbat became a call to quarantine human activities and confine the Spirit. In his effort to keep the Sabbath, he had lost sight of what made the Sabbath truly holy.

Jesus wasn’t concerned with keeping Sabbath. Jesus was concerned with making Sabbath a living, vital experience in the lives of His followers. He came to declare the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God doesn’t take a day off. God’s presence doesn’t pull back from people every seventh day. The Sabbath was established to enable men and women a time to intentionally seek out and encounter the divine in everyday life. By healing the crippled woman on the Sabbath, Jesus restored the essence of “Sabbath shalom”, a peaceful Sabbath to her twisted body. Healing this woman was not a special exception to Sabbath laws, it was the incarnation of the true Sabbath, bringing the living kingdom of God into the kingdoms of this world.

There is no zero tolerance policy in Christianity because Christ came to bring us all a second chance. Christians are “mulligan” people”— men and women of faith who have been granted the ultimate in second chances through the grace in Jesus Christ.

We Christian “mulliganeers,” know that we must pass the “mulligan” along. We must offer the compassion of a second chance to everyone we meet.