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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, August 21, 2022**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 21/Year C**  
**First Reading: Isaiah 58:9b-14**  
**Second Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29**  
**Gospel Reading: Luke 13:10-17**  
**Sermon Title: “Mercy Where Mercy is Needed”**

## **Theme**

*Jesus heals a woman on the sabbath, offering her a new beginning for her life. When challenged by a narrow reading of the sabbath command, Jesus responds by expanding “sabbath work” to include setting people free from bondage.*

## **Texts:**

**Gospel: Luke 13:10-17**

<sup>10</sup>Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. <sup>11</sup>And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup>But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” <sup>15</sup>But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? <sup>16</sup>And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?” <sup>17</sup>When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

## Sermon

A year ago in August of 2021, when wildfires swept through California, among other states of the American west, Carol and I made a special offering to Lutheran Disaster Relief through Zion. I encouraged you to do so. Maybe you did too.

Last December, when tornados devastated Kentucky, Carol and I made a special offering to Lutheran Disaster Relief through Zion. I encouraged you to do so. Maybe you did too

Last March, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Carol and I made a special offering to Lutheran Disaster Relief for Ukraine relief through Zion. I encouraged you to do so. Maybe you did too.

And after you blessed me with a gift for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination, Carol and I agreed to tithe that gift with a special offering to Lutheran Disaster Relief for flooding in Kentucky. Maybe you did too.

Why am I telling you this? To be a good example for you to follow? Yes! It is in the vows of ordination!

Will you pray for God's people,  
nourish them with the word and sacraments,  
and *lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?*

But that is beside the point. Not only do Carol and I give more than a tithe (a tithe is defined as 10% of one's gross compensation before taxes), but we are also generous by making special offerings, above and beyond our tithe when a special issue comes up that interests us. Why? Because we can! And because the example of Christ demonstrates "Mercy Where Mercy is Needed."

I am sure you are aware of this, but I want to remind you that there was only one Temple and it was in Jerusalem. Then, because travel in the first century was inconvenient and time-consuming, each Jewish community had a synagogue, which was like a satellite for worship, prayer, teaching, and learning. The Temple was presided over by priests, and the synagogue was presided over by rabbis. Other lay religious professionals, like scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were present at both the Temple and at the local synagogues.

In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus attended worship in a local synagogue (<sup>4:16</sup>as was his custom) when he noticed a woman crippled with a spirit for eighteen years. As you know, in scripture, every ailment was blamed on an evil spirit. My guess is she had osteoporosis or some other disease – I'm not a doctor. In my 25 years of ministry, I have given pastoral care to some who, for one reason or another, are crippled up and bent over. It must be a horrible existence not being able to look up – imagine!

Jesus saw her enter the synagogue, and notice, without her asking for anything from anyone, he called her over and said,

“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

Now, I have told you many times that, as God's creation, our first and preeminent purpose is to love and serve God, and that God is jealous for our attention through devotion, and worship. So when Jesus healed the woman, what did she do in response? She began praising God! Do you think that Jesus's healing of the woman was God-pleasing? Yes! On its own merit. God's desire for all creation, especially human beings, God's highest creation, is wholeness. So Jesus's activity was God-pleasing.

And as we have discussed, once the woman was healed and able to stand up straight, her response was to praise God! Do you think that the formerly crippled woman's praise was God-pleasing? Of course, it was!

However, there was a problem. The Third commandment, which is,

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

had been extended by the Law of Moses to include a prohibition against any work on the Sabbath.

Bexley Ohio is a hub for Jews in the greater Columbus area. Trinity Lutheran Seminary, where I got my Master's of Divinity, is located in Bexley and we lived in family housing there. Drake, my son, was in Cub Scouts and so in the fall, we had to walk the neighborhoods selling popcorn. If we went out soliciting on a Saturday, and we went to an orthodox Jew's home, they would come to the door but not open

it – because opening the door was considered work. They would often tell us through the closed door to come back another day.

When Jesus healed the woman, the "leader of the synagogue," probably a rabbi, completely ignored the God-pleasing activity and the God-worshiping result and became

indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, (and he) kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day."

Now this quote seems to blame the crippled woman for her healing, but I pointed it out to you that Jesus healed her without asking her. So was being healed considered work? Shouldn't the rabbi be angry at Jesus? He did the work!

But all that misses the point entirely. Jesus saw a need that he could fulfill and because he could, he had "*Mercy Where Mercy is Needed.*" I would argue along with Jesus, that delivering mercy where mercy is needed is not work, and is simply being godly and obedient!

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

We may laugh at the rabbi in this story and his condemnation of a merciful act, but he was just trying to be obedient to the Law of Moses, much like the rabbi in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who saw the plight of the guy who had been mugged and left for dead and walked on by.

And don't be confused, I am not justifying his position. I take Jesus's position, which is to say that the Law of Moses is *eclipsed* by the nature of God, and God's incarnate self, Jesus Christ, and his example which is to demonstrate love, grace, and mercy. And in this case, Jesus argued, "Give mercy where mercy is needed." My words, not his. How are you doing with this? I think a little self-reflection is required.

The church makes it easy to be merciful with the special offering opportunities we routinely mention – and just to be clear, these special ministry opportunities are above and beyond regular tithes. The church will cease to exist as a place out of

which mercy is delivered if we just redirect tithes to special offerings. How are you doing with this? I think a little self-reflection is required.

I mentioned my examples of giving money because it is easy and convenient and often the best help that we can give. I wish I could do more. I am told that after Hurricane Katrina, some of you went to the Gulf coast and physically helped people recover. I would have liked to do that. At the little church up north, we adopted a family from New Orleans and set them up in Lordstown. Not every act of mercy costs money. Fact is, the act of mercy Jesus performed in the Gospel Reading cost him nothing. How are you doing with this? I think a little self-reflection is required.

Everyone's resource situation is different, but if you had the opportunity and the means to deliver mercy, and you knew that delivering mercy is a godly and God-pleasing activity, why wouldn't you do that? That is the question Carol and I ask each other before we decided to make a special offering, even though it is our good pleasure to be a blessing to others.

Can you listen to someone in pain or distress? Can you offer a hand on their shoulder, and pray for them? Can you make a phone call to a person who is lonely, or offer a ride to the grocery store or church to someone who needs one? How are you doing with this? I think a little self-reflection is required.

Just a chapter ago, in Luke 12, Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." Most of us are so blessed. But that blessing is so we can be a blessing to others. How are you doing with this? I think a little self-reflection is required.

## **Prayer**

Merciful God, we pray that your Spirit never leaves us, and constantly makes us aware of the plight of others. And not just aware, merciful Father, but inclined to act as your Son and Our Lord Jesus would act, delivering "*Mercy Where Mercy is Needed.*" And we pray LORD, that you are blessed by our acts of mercy. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen