

Weekend of Sunday, August 25, 2019
11th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 21/Proper 16/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 13:10-17
Sermon Title: “You are Set Free!”

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.

Text

¹⁰Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And 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. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But 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.” ¹⁵But 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? ¹⁶And 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?” ¹⁷When 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

There are many situations in scripture that are difficult for us to get our heads around. That may be because two thousand years have passed and times have changed. It may be because we don't live in the Middle-East and so we are unfamiliar with Middle-eastern life, then or now. And it may be because we are not Jewish and don't understand Jewish customs and their mandate to honor the Law, more or less.

All of these reasons and maybe others are the reason this Gospel Reading from Luke is so difficult for us to understand. Let's review shall we.

It is the Sabbath, the sixth day of the week, about which the LORD God said shall be a day of rest, and not just for people, but for the animals that were used to do work, as well. Preserving the Sabbath is so important to God that God made it a commandment; the Third Commandment is "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Still to this day, Sabbath keeping is so important that observant Jewish rabbis, those who make observing the Law paramount in their lives, when visiting a parishioner at the Cleveland clinic on Saturday, will hover around the elevators to make sure someone else gets in, so that instead of pushing the button for the floor he wants to go to, which is work, will instead say, "Fourteen please" to whoever else gets in with them. Ask me, I've had the experience. And while we might think that is silly, to them, it is remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy.

Jesus was teaching on this particular day. He would have been in the position I am right now, and that is facing you, all of you. I alone can see what I can see. And what did Jesus see, but a woman crippled up so badly that she was unable to stand up straight. How Luke knew she was afflicted for eighteen years, I do not know, but he mentioned it in the story. Remember, nothing in scripture is an accident.

Now every once in a while I have some back pain, or some knee pain, can any of you relate? If I over did something, I will take it easy for a day or two and it might get better. If I think it is a more serious issue, I might see a doctor. Luke wrote that this woman was suffering for eighteen years, and I suspect, in that way Jesus always had, he knew the woman was suffering, and he knew he could 1) end her

suffering, and 2) use it as a teachable moment. Notice that even with her ailment, she was at worship. Though she was crippled, she was at worship.

Though Luke does not write anything about that, I think this may be part of Jesus' thinking. He saw a woman of great faith who worshiped regularly even though she suffered, and her suffering was likely a real impediment to her worship life and daily life.

Notice that the woman didn't ask to be healed, she just did the faithful thing with her ailment, and this touched Jesus, and so he said, **“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”** ¹³**When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.**

Wow! How I wish I could do that! Imagine being able to relieve the suffering of people, but God has not seen fit to give me that gift. But I digress.

Well, that would be a great Gospel Reading if it ended there. We could talk about the mercy of God demonstrated through Jesus. We could talk about the grace of God – we know practically nothing about the woman and she got healed. But the story doesn't end there does it.

A leader of the synagogue saw this and was incensed! **“There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.”**

I wonder how you feel about this leaders upset, shout out your impressions. Really just shout out how you feel.

Outrage, ridiculous, silly, merciless

Now I would like to ask you to try to put yourself in his position. You are a teacher, and respected leader. It is your job to teach and enforce the Law. This is difficult for us because we have been Christian all our lives and we know about the love, grace, and mercy God revealed in Jesus Christ, but this leader of the synagogue knew nothing about that. He was exactly why God incarnate in Jesus Christ came to straighten out this misconception about God. God did indeed give the commandment, because God is both selfish and loving.

Selfish in that God knows how we are, some of us are work-a-holics and will work every day if God didn't prohibit it. So God said there will be one day when all that faithful people will do is worship him, nothing else! And of course that "nothing else" got taken to the extreme by the Law-abiders, and so the Law became the thing they worshiped instead of the giver of the Law. And as a result, all sorts of rules exist about what can and cannot be done on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.

And God is loving in that God gave the faithful one day where they are just supposed to chill. And not only the faithful but their servants and slaves, their children, and their beasts of burden. God created it all, and wants all he created to have a break to chill too. So there is the Third Commandment that, according to this leader of the synagogue's opinion, Jesus broke, in doing "work" by healing the crippled woman.

Jesus told a parable in trying to explain what he did. I would like to ask you a question. If you were an orthodox law-abiding Jew, and had walked to worship at the local synagogue, and someone came in and shot the place up and you or your loved one was wounded, would you want your fellow worshipers or first-responders to do what they could to save lives?

The Law was given to give structure to the lives of faithful people. The Law was never intended to be a thing by which people would be judged. Put another more simple way, the Law is for people, not the people for the Law. Jesus believed so too.

Jesus was the teacher that day. He knew scripture. He knew Micah 6:8, and so do many of you.

what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Jesus didn't rub the leader's lack of understanding of scripture in his face, but he did give him a lesson in the application of scripture, by doing justice, and loving kindness. He did what he could do to relieve misery wherever he found it. And on this day, he said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." He touched her and made her whole and free.

I think it could be argued that the leader of the synagogue needed to be set free too, set free of his dogged pursuit of perfection in observance of the Law that caused him to not see the suffering of others. The suffering was the real abomination to God. He too needed to be "set free" of his strict observance of the Law.

How about you? What is holding you back from enjoying your life as a redeemed and freed child of God? The synagogue leader's observance of the Law was not in and of itself, a bad thing, he was just too one dimensional in his application. I know people who are trapped by their work.

"Pastor I wish I could come to worship, I actually miss it, but if I don't work all the overtime I can, I won't be able to make my boat payment."

"Pastor I wish I could come to worship, I actually miss it, but if I don't get my kids to practice they won't get to play in the game next week."

"Pastor I wish I could come to worship, I actually miss it, but if I don't work out next week's schedule at work, stuff won't happen."

How about you? What is holding you back from enjoying your life as a redeemed and freed child of God?

Now I know, you have work and family obligations. I understand. I also know I am preaching to the choir. You are the ones who are here. We on the Membership Ministry have heard it all when we try to restore our inactive members to active status. It's heart-breaking.

What I want to tell you is that remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy might be accomplished by doing godly activities.

We are looking for people to give some of our elderly a ride to church. That might be considered work by the synagogue leader, but not by Jesus.

We hand out food to the hungry on the Sabbath. If you've done it, you know that is work!

We've hosted funerals and funeral fellowship meals on the Sabbath. That is about the most merciful thing we do for a grieving family.

How about you? What is holding you back from enjoying your life as a redeemed and freed child of God?

Here I would like to make a plug for "God's Work Our hands Day of Service" coming up on the weekend of September 7-8. That is the Saturday and Sunday after Labor Day. Once a year the ELCA tries to get its members to be a visible demonstration of the love of God living out our faith by doing self-less activities in the community. I've signed you up to clean up the streets and sidewalks and devil's strips here in Cornersburg! Your welcome!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Yes, it is on the Jewish Sabbath, and Christians consider Sunday our Sabbath.

However, in conclusion, I would like to re-read a portion of the First Reading from Isaiah to you. This time listen to the exhortation of the LORD, and see how it fits in all that has been said today.

¹³If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
¹⁴then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

The Word of the Lord

Prayer

Loving, gracious, merciful God, set us free of all that distracts us from being your faithful people. Make us aware of the infinite opportunities we have to be a blessing to all you love and put in our paths. And give us your Holy Spirit so that we will indeed honor you with our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen