

## Scriptures

### Isaiah 58:9b-14

If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word; <sup>10</sup> if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon. <sup>11</sup> And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry. <sup>12</sup> Your people will rebuild what has long been in ruins, building again on the old foundations. You will be known as the people who rebuilt the walls, who restored the ruined houses.”

### **The Reward for Keeping the Sabbath**

<sup>13</sup> The Lord says, “If you treat the Sabbath as sacred and do not pursue your own interests on that day; if you value my holy day and honor it by not traveling, working, or talking idly on that day, <sup>14</sup> then you will find the joy that comes from serving me. I will make you honored all over the world, and you will enjoy the land I gave to your ancestor, Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken.

### Psalm 103:1-8

#### **The Love of God**

103 Praise the Lord, my soul!

All my being, praise his holy name!

<sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord, my soul,

and do not forget how kind he is.

<sup>3</sup> He forgives all my sins

and heals all my diseases.

<sup>4</sup> He keeps me from the grave

and blesses me with love and mercy.

<sup>5</sup> He fills my life with good things,

so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord judges in favor of the oppressed

and gives them their rights.

<sup>7</sup> He revealed his plans to Moses

and let the people of Israel see his mighty deeds.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord is merciful and loving,

slow to become angry and full of constant love.

## Luke 13:10-17

### **Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath**

<sup>10</sup> One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. <sup>11</sup> A woman there had an evil spirit that had kept her sick for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, “Woman, you are free from your sickness!” <sup>13</sup> He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

<sup>14</sup> The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, “There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!”

<sup>15</sup> The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. <sup>16</sup> Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?” <sup>17</sup> His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.

## Sermon

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.**

What do you see? In many ways we construct the world around us based on Perspectives, viewpoints. When we hear this story of Jesus healing the woman in the Synagogue what do you think is going on here -

### **What is Sabbath?**

The root of the conflict between the synagogue official and Jesus is how to properly observe the Sabbath.

Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. This is the fourth commandment of the law handed down to Moses by God. Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. It seems simple enough doesn't it? Today's gospel reading tells us something different though – in the scripture we read about two Jewish men who have very different

ideas of how to honor the Sabbath. The synagogue official and Jesus have very different viewpoints, different perspectives on what the Sabbath is all about.

Since God handed down the Sabbath tradition as a law, a good starting point will be to turn to the commandments in the Bible. The Decalogue, the ten commandments are listed in two parts of the Old Testament – Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. In both places it says almost word for word the same thing - Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.

But each has a different ending – a different reason given for why the Sabbath is important. In the Exodus account it ends with ‘in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. The Deuteronomistic version ends with ‘remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

We have two reasons given for the Sabbath, one has to do with creation, the other has to do with redemption. But really, both have to do with our identity and with God.

In the creation account of Sabbath, the Sabbath was the first full day that humanity spent on earth, it was their first day of trying to figure things out. So God sat them down before him and said ‘I know this is all very confusing for you, having just been created and all. So today, just sit down and look at me – look into my eyes. I will tell you who you are. I will show you where you came from and I will show you what I have planned for you. Sabbath is all about grounding ourselves in God.

When we move to the redemption account of the Sabbath, we find it is pretty much the same thing. While wandering about in the desert, being lost with nowhere to go, God asked his people to sit down before him and said to them 'I know all this is confusing for you, being out here in the desert feeling all alone and all. So, today, just sit down and look at me – look into my eyes. I will tell you who you are, I will show you where you came from and I will show you what I have planned for you.

It's the same thing, the same Sabbath. It's about being with God and finding ourselves and our purpose in him. There is a positive aspect to it – a thing we are to be doing – abiding with God, listening and learning.

But over time, the emphasis came to be on the negative aspect – the don't do any work part. The not doing work was really only meant to free us up to be with God, not doing work was not the focus of Sabbath, only the precondition – it's the first step of Sabbath.

Sabbath is time set aside to be with God, to recharge our spirits and to remember who we are.

With this understanding of Sabbath in mind, let's turn to this morning's story. The story takes place in a synagogue on a Sabbath morning. In the synagogue are an old woman, an official of the synagogue, Jesus, and a crowd of worshippers.

Let's begin with the woman. This woman sounds as though she is pretty aged. She has spent 18 years bent over because of a problem with her back – a problem caused by an evil spirit. Let's think about her and her condition for a moment – this evil spirit caused her to be stooped over – for years. When this woman is bent over, all she can see is the ground beneath her feet. She is unable to lift her eyes to see a sunset or a seagull, she can't see more than a few steps in front of her – she cannot look anyone in the eye, nor can anyone see her face.

This being bent over is more than just a hard way to live life, it's socially isolating – something we take for granted - face to face contact – is something that she simply cannot do. This woman was all but invisible to those around her – they

don't pay her any mind, and she lives her life on the fringes, on the margins of society.

Contrast this with Jesus. Jesus is sitting in the center of the synagogue, in the place of teaching. This special place, this place of honor and respect that Jesus occupies really represents the spiritual and social center of the whole community. All eyes are on Jesus as he speaks. All eyes except those of the woman. She is unable to lift her gaze, and she remains alone, apart from everyone.

Though she can't see Jesus, Jesus sees her. He calls her forward, from her invisible obscurity into the very centre of the community and into the presence of God.

Jesus lays hands on her – touches her – and heals her. Then he calls her “Woman.” As Jesus names her woman, he also restores to her both her dignity as a full human being and her divine status as a human being made in the image of God. She is able to stand – she is able to rise up and be all that God has made her to be. Notice how Luke is careful to present her standing straight and praising God as one action. She becomes the example of what Jesus' mission is all about: in the moment that she becomes a healed and liberated human being, she fulfills her dignity and calling by doing what human beings are created to do: she immediately praises God!

Remember I said that the Sabbath was a celebration of redemption, of God bringing his people out of slavery to a land of plenty, and that the Sabbath was also a celebration of creation – of that first perfect day with God. Jesus' healing of the woman was an act of redemption, he liberated her from her ailment and from the evil spirit that was tormenting her, and it was also tied in with the original creation, too, in that it not only restored her to the kind of health and vitality God desires for all his creatures, but also restored the relationship of free and easy communication with God in the form of her worship. Creation. Redemption. Jesus had both Sabbath themes up and running at the same time.

But not everyone present was pleased with Jesus' actions. The synagogue official saw what was happening – he saw an uproar, he saw a commotion. And he wanted to stop it.

Now, it's easy for us to hate on the uptight religious types that always seemed to be opposing Jesus. We see this man as an uptight, judgmental, close-minded, harsh, moralistic, religious fanatic. He's a man in who doesn't know Jesus and is in love with the rules.

Before we start throwing stones though we need to pause and consider. Uptight, judgmental, close-minded, harsh, moralistic – are those words that people outside the church might use to describe some of us? This man was interested in maintaining order and decorum in the worship space that he was responsible for – he was doing what he felt was necessary.

The truth is, this official likely got up in the morning thinking about God and how he could serve God better. He didn't always get it right, but he was trying. The tension in this story is not between Jesus and a nasty caricature of a man, but it is between two faithful Jewish men who are struggling with what it means to be faithful. Both men believe they are keeping Sabbath.

The issue for the official is this – God gave a rule about the Sabbath. Men had added to that rule and made it so big that it tended to overshadow the original purpose of Sabbath, but God did made a rule about no work on that day.

And along comes Jesus, performing miracles which looked a lot like work. The issue for the official was not so much that a rule was being broken, but something greater. If Jesus was breaking one of God's commandments, then it couldn't be God who was at work in him performing the miracle. The official likely thought there was a sorcerer or some other kind of foul Baal worshipper disrupting the worship, and in the name of God he had to put a stop to it. Remember, the nation of Israel succeeded and failed as a nation – the whole nation paid the price when people turned away from God – this official was not just maintaining order, but was protecting his whole people.

The entire issue has to do with timing. Had it not been a Sabbath, there would not be a problem. The official simply wants Jesus to wait for the appointed time. This is not a time for work – ironically God's day is no time for miracles - but tomorrow is a day for work, tomorrow is a day for healing. If you remember,

tomorrow is the day that Pharoah wanted the frogs gone. Tomorrow really just means some other time, just not right now. I'm going to start exercising tomorrow. Sure, right.

Jesus believes the time for God's grace and healing is *now*, not some indeterminate point in the future. When Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God he speaks about it being right here, right now. It's not coming, it's here – don't you perceive it?

If you flip back a page in your bible you'll read last week's lesson where Jesus said 'I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over! The time is now.

When Jesus looks upon the woman, off in the corner, stooped over, suffering, a prisoner in her own body he sees her life as being precious – each day is a gift and an opportunity to praise God. Why should she not be free immediately? Jesus frees this bound woman to raise her up into her original form, to allow her to look her God in the face and praise him.

The time is now, and Sabbath is a statement of that. You see, we don't really understand Sabbath in the way it was understood in Jesus' time. We've changed Holy Days into holidays. It's a day off, it's a day for me to do something I want to do.

For the Israelites the Sabbath was not just a day of rest – it was a day of promise. The promise that was present in the original creation, the promise that is present in the redemption of Israel – it is a day to celebrate that promise and our Creator who made the promise.

This means that Sabbath provides a foretaste of the culmination of all things, it's a glimpse of God's dominion, a little slice of the messianic age dropped into the midst of regular time. The Sabbath was a symbol of the resistance God's people offered to tyrants of every sort and in every time...Sabbath is a day that lifts people's eyes to God's promise in the midst of the most unpromising circumstances.

I called you an apocalyptic people last week – did you catch it, and did you understand what it means? An apocalypse is a revelation. It's not the end of the world, as we use the word now, it's the revelation of God's Kingdom. We are an apocalyptic people; we reveal God in this dark world. We represent the leading edge of the Kingdom of God that is present right now and even now is growing.

The Sabbath is an apocalyptic day, to the Israelites it was a display of power and loyalty to God in the face of the tyrants who lorded over God's people, it was the day when they rejected the values and demands of the world and its rulers and turned their attention to God, his kingdom, and his promises.

In turning the Sabbath from a Holy Day for God into a holiday for us, we've lost that apocalyptic vision. Now that the Sabbath is not even a holiday any more we've lost the last traces of rebellion against the forces of the world that this day once had.

On this Sabbath I challenge you to stop. Take some time and ask yourself - who are the tyrants in your life that demand your attention, your energy, your spirits? What would it require in your lives to escape that oppression, even for just one day a week? Most of us actually feel anxiety if our time and attention is not fully taken up in an activity or in some type of electronic media. What would it require for our souls to be at rest in God, here, on earth?

As we take the time to consider the meaning of Sabbath and to find ways that we can participate in this apocalyptic resistance to the forces of the world, consider how the bent-over woman's gaze was lifted up to God in praise, perhaps our perspective too will be raised and will lead us to new and deeper faithfulness and praise.

Amen.