

“Who Are We Really?”

Luke 13: 10-17 and Jeremiah 1:4-10

There's an old story told about a respectable church. One Sunday the people of that congregation had gathered for worship, all decked out in their Sunday-go-to-meeting best, when a man walked into the sanctuary who just didn't seem to belong. He was scruffy in appearance and ragged of dress. He smelled of beer and way he walked, he had consumed in great quantity the night before. The usher handed the man a bulletin, and motioned him toward an out-of-the-way pew. Ignoring his suggestion, the visitor staggered down the center aisle to the front pew, and planted himself there. So far, so good, thought the ushers -- that is, until the minister began his sermon. "Hallelujah!" shouted the newcomer. The minister gave him a look, and continued on. Not a moment later, the visitor interrupted him again. "Praise the Lord!" he proclaimed. One of the ushers came over and whispered to him, as nicely as he could, "Sir, we don't do that here!" "But I've got God!" the man objected. "Yes, sir," said the usher. "I'm sure you do. But you didn't get it here!" A good question for all us to think about in our journey of faith with God is: “Who are we Really? Is God part of your life all the time? Is your relationship with God a social thing or a spiritual thing? “Do we always let the words of Jesus transform our lives? Yes, it was the Sabbath day in our Gospel lesson today and always meant to be a beautiful day for God's people! And even on the Sabbath people became sick or continue to be sick.

On this participate day Jesus notice a woman, all hunched over, obviously one who had been ill for a long time. Jesus takes the initiative to call her over and lay his hands on her. In these gracious acts the woman is healed on the spot. Her body is straightened again, and she praises God for God's goodness. What a great act of kindness! Wouldn't it have been nice if all the people standing around witnessing this touching scene could have joined the woman in praising God for God's kindness? Indeed, the whole idea of worshipping a loving God on the Sabbath could have been thus reinforced in a powerful way. But that is not what happened. As soon as Jesus finishes his lovely deed, the keepers of the Sabbath, the religious leaders, become angry. The ruler of the synagogue reminds everyone that there are six other days in the week when such deeds of healing could be done; even such a kind deed as healing was not allowable on the seventh day. Healing was considered work, and, as every good Jew knew it.

Jesus, of course, is stirred up by this heartless interpretation. Jesus reminds the religious leaders of their double standard by how they regularly go about caring for their own animals on the Sabbath by giving them water, but couldn't accept a similar act caring for sick human beings on the Sabbath. In the eyes of the crowd taking this all in, Jesus put the religious leaders to shame and gained the crowd's admiration for what he had done and said. A perfectly beautiful situation ends up in unpleasant tension. How sad. Do you understand the whole situation? First, Jesus showed the woman in the temple and knew what was going on with this woman Jesus could see beyond the law to the power of grace, kindness, caring and compassionate for those people suffering around him. Here a little background in Jesus' time. The synagogue was a place for men to worship. There was a place off to the side for the women and the two did not mix. So this lady should not of even been in the same room with Jesus and the other men, but she was.

My thoughts what she might have been thinking about: "I have been ill for many years. This new rabbi is not like the others. He seems to care. The other people accuse me of having a sin or something that caused this condition, but I have heard that Jesus does not accuse, but heals many people. So I maybe if I very quietly walk over the other side, he might see me and heal me. I am going to give it a try. "She very quietly walks over to the other side. Stays in the shadows. But When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." Can you imagine her excitement. Maybe these were her thoughts: "He did it, he made me free! He healed me! He did not yell at me or accuse me of having a sin or my family of having sinned, no He just healed me. Period. I am free, praise God." And I would imagine that she walked over to the other side, showed the other women what happened, and then worshiped God praising Him for this freedom. Now remember this the religious leaders thought Jesus was somehow sabotaging the Sabbath. And, in a way, Jesus was accusing them also of sabotaging the Sabbath in an equally serious way.

Let's see what we can learn from these conflicting viewpoints. We can begin by pointing out that the ruler of the synagogue here should be encouraged for wanting to guard the Sabbath. God gave the Sabbath for beneficial reasons. The rhythm of our lives and bodies calls for predictable periods of rest. We need a Sabbath for the welfare of our own bodies and spiritually being. In addition, the Sabbath affords a reasonable time for families to be together. God realizes that families need time for nurturing.

The Sabbath is a time set aside for us(God's People ) to be praising and worshipping God. This religious leader saw the necessity of all these good things happening, so he rightly wanted to guard the Sabbath from intrusions that might threaten its observance. Good for him! That would help here today. Most commercial ventures are open for business, and one thing has led to another. Sundays are no longer sacred. The decline of Sunday worship in America in a lot of places been replace by secular activities on Sundays—like school sports. We might further inquire whether there isn't a relationship between the decline of family values and the decline of Sunday worship. So the religious leaders took God's masterful idea of the Sabbath and pushed it too far. Believe it or not, it was OK not to help anyone on Sabbath because they were following the of letter of the law. How many times do you and I end up doing something just as ridiculous!

We carry our good intentions too far and don't kind who they are! Then the leaders of that synagogue turned their attention to Jesus. They accused him of working on the Sabbath. But Jesus counters that with a statement about untying an animal on the Sabbath to lead it to water and then saying or implying that if you can water an animal on the Sabbath, can't I, Jesus, do about the same thing. 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?" 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.

Recall with me in this parable: "The Good Samaritan." how two other representatives of true religion passed by the bleeding victim lying in the ditch. It took a man who was not considered religious to bring aid to person in need. So Jesus was not about to allow love to be superseded by a religious demand that in itself was largely instructive. It was always love that informed Jesus; he was faithful to every call involving human need. Jesus would overthrow the strict demands of the law if it meant saving a lost soul. This is the compelling point behind the whole story of our salvation, isn't it? Strictly speaking God was under no obligation to save you and me. In fact, the demands of God's law indicated that you and I should be condemned. But God did not come around reminding us, "You made your bed; now sleep in it. "That is not God's attitude toward you or me, is it? Our sins stretch from A to Z. As pride-filled sinners, we have gone around breaking God's holy law at will, and a lot of times we haven't even felt sorry about it. Instead of sins winning God allowed love to fulfill the law.

The Bible tells us that "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law ..." (Galatians 4:4-5). In closing, Jesus had a passion for people not rules and regulations. Yes! Some rules are needed, but Jesus saw through all those artificial rules to the most basic rule that being kind to people and helping them is the most important rule. Today, we can celebrate Jesus' freeing and healing the woman ---- eighteen years. Also the way Jesus' didn't let the of laws or rules interfere with the true meaning of God and his love. What Sabbath really meant! May we find in Jesus a faith that frees us from all things. Maybe we can learn not to let anything get in our way of responding in love. Yet the synagogue leader did help us see something maybe he didn't even realize. Jesus makes a good case that if we can untie an animal to take it to water, we should also show acts of love to others, even if the timing isn't right. The synagogue leader might ask the important question of where we draw the line. We can too quickly make excuses to do what we want or need to do. We can rationalize anything if we try hard enough. We can search through scripture to find a proof text that justifies what we already believe. We seem to do just that when it comes to the Sabbath commandment. We focus so much on our freedom from nitpicky rules that we don't honor the Sabbath at all. We forget that the Sabbath, just as all of the "laws," comes to us as a gift. We can honor the Sabbath by fighting against suffering and evil in this world.

We can celebrate not having to struggle to define "work" to such an extent that we don't use the Sabbath as it was intended: to set aside time to spend time with God. Jesus reinterprets the Sabbath as a time to live into the wholeness offered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus puts the focus that God's Love is more important in our lives and laws can be stumbling blocks for us and excuses as well. It making our worship alive in our lives. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbor as our selves. That is it. Loving God means for one thing to come to worship to praise Him and listen to his word in the Bible and relive God's actions on earth through the live of His Son, Jesus. Loving our neighbor means we are to reach out with the compassion of Christ that is in us to those around us who are hurting. Let us respond in love to others and be transform by his words. Let us look at God's teachings as a gift, not a burden that we always have the energy to do God's work. Let us celebrate the freedom to live into honoring Sabbath as active worship, as active ministry, as embodying the life to come.