



Sermon Series: "A Visit to the Good Physician"

"Sabbath Keeping"

Preaching Text: Luke 13:10-17

25 August 2013: 14th Sunday after Pentecost

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We rarely think of Jesus as a rule breaker and yet this is, in part, what our text addresses today. Hear the lesson for the day, Luke 13:10-17:

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 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. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and 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.

14 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."

15 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? 16 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?" 17 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 (Luke 13:10-17).

In Jesus' healing of the infirmed woman, he demonstrates a trait of being a citizen in God's realm. Jesus not only heals her, but also calls her a "daughter of Abraham." This label suggests that she is a full member of Jewish society—remarkable. Luke's Jesus constantly reminds us that God's realm includes all: women and the unwell/infirm. The woman does not request cure and no one asks for her. Rather, Jesus identifies her and heals her. She reacts in praise.

And yet a "leader" speaks to the "throng." Speaking to many, he aims his real words at Jesus and misses Jesus' point. The synagogue leader, if here today, might point out that we, like those in ancient Israel, have forgotten the Sabbath. Recall one of the ten commandments: "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Deuteronomy 5:12 repeats the commandment a touch differently: "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you."



Indeed, the ten commandments are inflexible about Sabbath-keeping: “But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For 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” (Exodus 20:10-11). There is no question: the Sabbath is important to Israel.

Sabbath is so key that Jesus’ rebuttal comes across as even more clever. Although forbidden in one part of the Mishnah (Jewish book of laws), untying an ox or a donkey on the sabbath was permitted in another. Jesus, Luke seems to be telling us, has “set free” or untied the woman tied to Satan. If you untie animals on the sabbath, then why not humans? Honor and “shame” were, and are, central features of Near Eastern culture. Realizing that he is right, Jesus seems to shame the “leader” and other “foes” in front of the crowd. They in turn rejoice in this wonder-worker. God’s realm is open to all who turn to God.

The dispute between the synagogue leader and Jesus was not over the importance of the Sabbath. They both, no doubt agreed on Sabbath’s prominence. Rather, Jesus’ point was that there were some things that overrode the law of Sabbath-keeping. My guess is that if someone broke the Sabbath, then Jesus would urge that the reason be important in the extreme—such as a healing of a human life. Anything less would not serve as a noble excuse for Jesus. Because the Sabbath is God’s grand gift to believers, we should not take it lightly. Rather the gift is to be used for four primary purposes:

- 1. Ceasing work.**
- 2. Resting from the daily struggles of life.**
- 3. Embracing those who are important to us.**
- 4. Feasting on the goodness of God and God’s creation.**

In short, God provides Sabbath so that God’s people could remember and worship God. Even some of the most secular people, or in this case a 16th century Roman



Catholic Deist of sorts, have extolled rest:

Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer, since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgment Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller, and more of it can be taken in at a glance, and lack of harmony or proportion is more readily seen.

These are the words of Leonardo da Vinci, and no idler he; he excelled as a painter, sculptor, poet, architect, engineer, city planner, scientist, inventor, anatomist, military genius, and philosopher—and he advised to “now and then go away” and take a break.

May we appreciate that the Sabbath is a brilliant gift to our human family. If God rested on the Sabbath, could we not use a little rest too? But also—just every now and again—remember that Jesus said: “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

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