

Trinity Lutheran Church  
24 August 2025  
(Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost)

## **Luke 13:10-17**

*10Now he 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.*

My my, what happened here is a bit unusual and it sure made the for some lively interactions! Jesus is teaching in one of the synagogues. Nothing unusual there...after all he is Jewish and he takes his faith seriously. But then he sees a woman in the congregation. This in itself is remarkable. In Jesus' day the men took the front seats in the synagogue leaving the back rows for the women. Not only that but this woman had a physical condition that caused her to be doubled over. The original Greek word is the same word they used to describe a piece of paper that is folded in half. This woman had a very bad crippling condition. This woman sitting in the back, literally, would be easy to overlook. You could cast a glance into the congregation and totally miss her. But Jesus didn't.

Instead he calls her to come forward and from that moment on, everything changes. Luke tells us that Jesus performed a miracle here but the miracle itself is barely described. Some healing stories go to great lengths to show the run up and details the actions that Jesus performed. But not here. Here Luke rushes past the graphic physical description of the miracle to highlight the conflict. This miracle in Luke's gospel serves as a set-up for the conflict Jesus has with the synagogue leader. The key issue in this conflict is this: "Is performing a miracle considered work? And if so, then the Synagogue leader says, Jesus isn't a good Jew, he's breaking the law for the law says one shouldn't work on the Sabbath.

The synagogue leader doesn't like what he sees. Things were fine when Jesus was teaching but now with this healing, things are going sideways and getting out of control. So what does the leader of the synagogue do? He doesn't directly confront Jesus—or the healed woman—but he addresses the congregation who just witnessed what Jesus had done saying, *"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 don't know about you but hearing this, I just want to smack this guy. This woman who has been doubled over for 18 years is instantly and completely cured, yet, instead of praising God for this miraculous healing his concern is that Jesus broke the Jewish Sabbath day restrictions. He has such a rigid understanding of what should and shouldn't take place on the Sabbath that he speaks out against Jesus and the poor woman Jesus has just healed. He rebukes Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and indirectly rebukes the woman for being crippled and showing up at the synagogue in the first place. (What he failed to see is that the crippled woman didn't come to the synagogue to be healed, she came to worship and praise God like everyone else. And immediately after her healing that's exactly what she did!)

The synagogue leader can't get his head around the fact that God works in ways that are beyond his control. I've known people like him and, sad to say, sometimes I'm just like him. He was telling the crowd over and over again that anyone needing healing needs to come through the appropriate legal channels, and that means not on the Sabbath. Worship of the sabbath is to be predictable and orderly. There is no room for spontaneity. The crowd needs to understand that keeping the Sabbath means refraining from doing work. They need to understand that rules and rituals are there for their own good, for their own protection...so they are to be respected no matter what. Their purpose is to shield us from things that would cause us confusion and to lose our dignity.

Apparently the synagogue leader's argument was convincing to a lot of people because Jesus' first words in response are, "You hypocrites!". He then reminds

them that they care for animals on the sabbath making sure they are cared for and have food and water...and isn't a woman, a human being—a daughter of Abraham—suffering for 18 years of greater value than their livestock?

Jesus was not breaking the sabbath but honoring it. Time after time, rather than following their restrictions, he honored God on the Sabbath by putting into practice God's mercy and compassion in the lives of people who were suffering and in need.

It was the religious leaders that are always accusing him of dishonoring God by violating the Sabbath. In response, Jesus points out the hypocrisy of their obsession with rules.

"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy". This is number three of the Ten Commandments. But how is the sabbath to be "kept holy"? The Jewish answer was by imitating God who after creation rested on the seventh day. That is one way and it's not to be ignored, but Jesus is insisting that this law must always give way to mercy, to life, to freedom. Laws do help us live our lives better, but grace has priority because grace creates life itself. Laws order our world, but grace holds the world together. Good and just laws force us to care for each other, but grace is the glue that binds us to God and each other...when we've failed in keeping the law.

Jesus demonstrated to the crowd that keeping the Sabbath holy was not about observing rules and "thou shalt nots." Keeping the Sabbath holy was about worshiping God by celebrating God's work of releasing people from bondage and giving them new lives so that they, too, can praise God. That's what Jesus did for the woman in today's gospel and that's what Jesus did for you and me when, out of love, he died on the cross and rose again, releasing us from the bondage of sin and giving us a new lease on life. Like the doubled-over woman, we did not ask for this gift. It is pure grace...it's the purest form of love. And having received this gift, we are freed to thank and praise God with so much enthusiasm that others cannot help but want to join in.

So how do **we** keep the Sabbath holy today? How do **we** worship God in the 21st century? The way the Sabbath was kept when you and I were growing up is long gone. Now on Sundays we work, we shop, we play sports or watch them on television, we do everything that we do on any other day of the week. With our busy schedules, for many people Sundays are for sleeping in or being with the family with a focus on having as much fun as we can with our free time. We struggle with honoring the Sabbath and using the day to worship God.

On the one hand, I think few of us would want to return to a world filled with blue laws and strict rules about how to observe the Sabbath--even if we could. On the other hand, the temptation is always there to join the throngs of people for whom Sunday is no different from any other day. Yet the very fact that we do come to worship says that we are looking for something more, that we are looking for ways to keep the Sabbath holy and to thank and praise the God who gives us life.

So we gather together to tell and to hear the story of God's love for us. We experience that love, given to us in the hearing of God's word and when we share bread and wine. This word and these actions joins us to God and to each other, and to all Christians in every time and every place. When we come to church we rejoice in God's graciousness and give thanks for these gifts. And we also bring and give money for ministries happening locally and around the globe that liberate people from poverty and illness and bondage. We donate food for the hungry. We share our time and talents on projects that demonstrate God's care for this world.

We keep the sabbath holy when we gather to praise God. And we praise God by doing and acting in loving ways that benefit our neighbor. Yes, by following Jesus' example and caring for people who are hurting...that's how we keep the Sabbath holy and that's how we are to worship God. Amen.