

Pastor Mollie's Sermon
August 25, 2019
Luke 13:10-17- Healing on the Sabbath

A nap.
A good book.
Worship.
Family dinner.
Doing a puzzle.
A walk around the lake.
Coffee with a dear friend.
Devotions.
How do you do Sabbath?

A local Pastor, Kara Root wrote an article on Sabbath in Word and World- which is a series of booklets published by Luther Seminary. Pastor Root's article is titled "The Gift of Rest" and defines Sabbath as "slowing down. Noticing, and breathing." Her family and other congregation members at Lake Nokomis Lutheran spend 2 Sundays a month observing the Sabbath- intentionally being, instead of thoughtlessly doing."

We are really good at "doing". We "do" all the time, without ceasing. We do more than one thing at a time to "save time"; we pay bills and watch TV and eat dinner simultaneously.

Doing is what we know.

The more we get done in a day, the better we feel about ourselves.

And because of this we have all but lost the concept of rest as a part of life,

As necessary to thriving and surviving.

Generally, we stop only when we simply can't keep going any longer.

Sabbath must be earned,

Vacation hours saved up.

We see Sabbath or rest as weak. Sabbath is lazy or unmotivated; slackers and freeloaders rest a lot.

And yet, Sabbath is one that God commands of us.

This practice of Sabbath is not new.

It has been woven into God's way of relating with God's people from the very beginning.

Creation, the Exodus; God's life-giving rhythm of work and rest is part of the fabric of it all.

Today's reading provides us with new ways of understanding Sabbath through the eyes of those in our Gospel reading.

As we listened to today's Bible passage about healing on the Sabbath

it's easy for us not only to sympathize and rejoice with this woman, but also to mentally chastise the leader of the synagogue.

How could he be so cold hearted that he would object to the gift of healing Jesus offered?

But before moving too quickly to judgment, it may help to understand a bit more about the origin and nature of the Sabbath commandment.

As I previously mentioned, the Sabbath has two origins in Scripture.

One roots it in the story of creation – as God rested on the seventh day, so also should all creation have a time of rest and renewal.

It's second "origin story" comes from Exodus account, as Sabbath rest comes not as a command but as good news to slaves who never, ever had a chance to rest.

Imagine you are a people, enslaved for generations, never in conscious memory having been free, and then suddenly you are.

Free. Completely.

And you have no idea how to be free, because you never have been free.

You have been defined by slaves for as long as you can remember.

You have been driven by the demand for more from you, and more and more, in a society completely structured around endless production.

And then God delivered you from this and brings you out of Egypt.

What does that then look like?

Well thankfully God gives us some instructions.

The God who delivered us out of slavery, who created you and claims you

Now tells you with Ten words (commandments really) what free people's lives look like

And what allows human beings to be most fully who God intended them to be all along.

God begins with how we are to relate to God, and then ends the list with some obvious directions about how to relate to each other.

But right in the middle, between these two movements- relating to God and relating to other- is this hinge point.

Remember the Sabbath day and Keep it Holy.

And it turns out to be the key to the whole thing.

It could say that the other nine commandments take the people out of slavery, but the Sabbath Commandment takes the slavery out of the people.

Indeed, the command/promise to be free to rest and be renewed was extended to all.

Rich or poor, adult or child, human or animal, everyone needs a time to Sabbath, and so God makes it a commandment to safeguard Sabbath for all.

We hear of this in Jesus' sharp response- "dont you untie your donkey and lead it to water?"

Does this woman not deserve to be set free too?

So of course, now we want to wave our fingers at the synagogue leader for trying to stop this!

But I simply want to point out that the synagogue leader was trying to defend a law that was at the heart of the Exodus covenant with God.

He wasn't saying, "Don't heal."

He was rather saying, "There are six days on which to heal.

Why not heal on one of those days and respect this core tenet of our faith?"

More than that, I suspect this synagogue leader had a deep respect not only for tradition but for law and order.

If one starts breaking the Sabbath law, after all, what will go next?

Law helps to protect us, offers the possibility of creating order, and at its best provides stability, all of which are essential for human flourishing.

And so this leader of the synagogue may have been trying to stick up for the principle of law and order with which most of us, truth be told, would support.

But whether it is respect for tradition, the value of rest, or the principle of law and order that is at stake,

Jesus places this woman's health and wellbeing above all of them.

Jesus, that is, while also respecting the law, seeing the law from a different perspective-
Not saying he is above the law, but
recognizes that the law itself was given as a gift to serve God's children and draw them more
deeply into the abundant life God offers.

And so perhaps Jesus' sharp critique is that the leader of the synagogue had forgotten that the
law was intended to serve God's people
and instead held it in highest regard for its own sake.

He forgot that the law is meant to create the conditions in which we can help each other live into
the best versions of ourselves – and into who God calls us all to be–
and instead ended up sacrificing this woman's rejoicing to satisfy his sense of law and order.
It's an interesting idea, isn't it?

That the law invites us to nurture, tend, and keep compassion at the forefront.

That the law is God's gift to help us live into God's hope that all people would be treated with
love and respect,

that all people would grow up with a robust measure of dignity,

that all people would have enough to eat and a safe place to live.

This story sends us out hearing of God's profound love for us and all people and sensing God's
commission to us to look out for the welfare of each other, and ourselves

recognizing that while law is good, love is even better.

Interesting, the inherent logic of the law itself reinforces this.

Absent of law, it's each person for him or herself, but when we receive the law as God's gift to
help us live into God's hope of abundant life for all,

we recognize that we are most faithful to the law when we use it to help and protect each other,
not insist on it for its own sake or for personal gain.

And suddenly, rather than looking out for ourselves, we have a whole community of people
looking out for us, even as we look out for all others.

What a wonderful identity into which we are invited,

placing the law of love above all other laws and reaching out to help those around us stand up a
little taller as they hear of and experience God's love through our words and deeds.

Even when... Especially when we observe the Sabbath.

One is not greater than the other. Law and love are equally needed.

So may the Law help us order our world.

May love- that is grace hold our world together.

And may the Sabbath- return us to God's care:

Reminding us who we are and whose we are,

Sabbath restores us to our humanity as children of God,

Alongside other children of God, made in the image of God, who rests.

And this sets us free.