

## SERMON- Proper 16 (C)

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Isaiah 58:9b-14

Psalms 103:1-8

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

### OPENING:

I had lunch this week with my *oldest* friend,  
the friend who I have known the longest...since Elementary School.

My friend, Jacob, happens to be Jewish;

and I can remember attending his Bar Mitzvah 30+ years ago.

Jacob lives in DC now, worships at a big downtown synagogue, where he serves as a lay reader.

He has to study a couple hours each time he is scheduled to read from the Torah...

because it's in Hebrew,

and there is no punctuation.

and there are no vowels.

Midway through our lunch, I got around to asking Jacob:

“At church this week, the Gospel reading is this story about Jesus healing this woman with a bent back. What happens next is that the leader of the synagogue, the Jewish authority, is *indignant* at Jesus for doing so on the Sabbath.....

Jesus looks really good in the story, and the Jewish leaders looks really bad.

Now I know how I have been trained to explain that dynamic, to think about it in a way that it's not anti-Jewish, that does not caricature Jews as overly legalistic or callous. But what would *you* say, what's *your* reaction?”

I asked him this, again, because this passage seems like a slam dunk, it seems like such an obvious portrayal. And there has to be more.

This is how he responded.

“Gosh, it's it is so hard and difficult living as a Jew in our world in 2025, it's refreshing as to be posed a question that is essentially asking whether we can use our vacuum cleaner on the Sabbath! “

Then he said: “The ‘Judaism’ described in the Gospels is just not very relevant. For almost 2000 years, the Temple has been destroyed, the whole apparatus of ritual sacrifice is impossible. The need to atone has to come from somewhere else, and so it occurs through prayer, through study, through your relationship with other people, Perhaps through good works.

Judaism is not the monolith that it seems in these stories.

It was not then, and it's definitely not now.

Then he went further.

Jacob said: “The Christian understanding, correct me if I am wrong, is that likewise the Temple has been destroyed, but the full and perfect sacrifice has been achieved through the death and Resurrection of the incarnate God, the person of Jesus Christ. All you have to do, to be *at one* with God, is acknowledge that offering, and salvation is at hand.”

Then my friend interjected:

“Charles, wait a second, do I need to come in and talk to your congregation?”

## **GOSPEL**

Usually when we think a story poses easy answers;

it’s actually much more complex, and the story is worth revisiting.

It starts with how we see ourselves in the story, how we insert ourselves.

We/ I like to put myself in the story as the hero, as Jesus, in this case, and say:

“Clearly what I would have done... if faced with that dilemma... I would have absolutely healed the individual regardless what the powers that be said.”

OR we become the victim: “we are in need of healing... and if only (and insert whoever you want as the villain in the story) would ‘get off my **back**’ then I could be saved.”

In truth, we might need to pause and to consider ourselves, instead, to occupy the role of the “bad guy” in the story.

To acknowledge that we also put so much importance on rules, on schedules, on procedure, etc.

We also have misshapen/ bent understandings of work and rest and Sabbath.

And then to ask “why and how are we also like the Pharisees?”

This week is Welcome Home Weekend, we have a baptism at 10 AM.

What is God saying to the people of St. Timothy’s, in this busy moment, with this story of healing?

## **SABBATH**

The first thing to remember is that there are multiple understandings from the Old Testament about what the Sabbath is.<sup>1</sup>

One emphasis is indeed that God urges/ commands us to rest.

In Genesis, right at the beginning, it’s the first thing that God pronounces as holy.

Not a place, not a person, but a time. The ‘Sabbath’

Jesus, though, “chooses the other, complementary emphasis” about what the

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<sup>1</sup> Raynal, Charles E. 2010. “Pastoral Perspective” (Luke 3:10-17) in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Volume 3) edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 382, 384.

Sabbath can mean. The Old Testament also says that the Sabbath should be observed in recognition of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The Sabbath, then, is an active practice and undertaking of a holy work. Where we recall, remember and reenact what God has done in history

So two understandings, both right.  
We need wisdom to tell the one from the other.

I had another Jewish friend, this time when we were living in New Orleans, and she was interviewing to work as a counselor at a Christian school. During the interview, she attended a faculty meeting where the faculty did a Bible study. She was surprised when everyone agreed on the meaning of the passage, as if that were the point, because in her religious experience as a Jew, argument and discussions always followed Scripture. Rabbis parsed and discussed openly and freely.

In fact, you were to take great delight in the complexity of what was being taught. Before you object on denominational grounds, that school that my friend interviewed in New Orleans was an Episcopal school!

We all can become Fundamentalists, at the time and place of our choosing, as in my question to my friend, or in a cursory reading of our passage.

## **LIBERATION:**

A glance at our own nation's history reveals how Pharisees are not confined to 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. In the antebellum South, slave owners would try to prevent the enslaved from worshipping, from participating in the Sabbath. Frederick Douglass wrote about these intentional efforts to confine African Americans on the Sabbath to activities that did not include worship, or study, or rest. They did so because it was a form of maintaining oppression and manipulation.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder that the Old Testament story of Exodus, of deliverance from bondage was/is so powerful in black culture.

Thus, in our story, there is a great irony.  
The woman has the bent back, she is physically inverted,  
but it's actually the Pharisees who have things backwards.  
Likewise the slaveowners walked upright and were the pillars of their society, but

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<sup>2</sup> Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. 2010. "Exegetical Perspective" (Luke 3:10-17) in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Volume 3) edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 385, 387.

it's actually the enslaved who were following Jesus, ready for Jesus' healing touch, reading to be liberated.

In some way, even, we are all like the bent woman, only capable of staring at the ground, we are prevented from staring up and seeing the Savior in front of us. We only see the dirt and dust and grime of this world. We are in need of being set free, of that healing.

We are called to do exactly that, to rise from our bent condition and walk freely. There is something about God's love that surprise and invades, unexpectedly and surprisingly, something about Jesus touch that defies all rituals.

There's the other part of the story that deserves attention: the woman does not even ask for the healing. Jesus just does it. It's not an emergency, either, if you really want to parse the details. She had had the affliction for 18 years, what's another day.

That's the gift of the Sabbath, where Jesus is ultimately our rest and all our attempts to institutionalize and constrain it.

It's like the child that we are going to baptize today.

Baptism, for an infant, requires the Parents and God parents to stand up and be present.

But the baby, the infant, the toddler, and the child of God gains by doing nothing. Again, it takes much wisdom to discern how to do that. To meet God's demands for Sabbath rest, but at the same time be receptive to God's liberating love and to channel it to others.

I will end by trying to connect the Sabbath to baptism in one other way.

At various time in history the calendar people have tried to make our calendar more efficient, by making it a 10 day week. It's never took and instead we have this strange holdover from Ancient times, where on the 7<sup>th</sup> day where are called to rest.

Finally, Our baptismal font, like many in churches, has 8 sides, that's because it's supposed to represent the eighth day of creation, new creation.

The Sabbath beyond the Sabbath."<sup>3</sup>

God's healing love calling us to be cleansed and healed, to rest, and to rise.

**AMEN**

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<sup>3</sup> Price, Charles, and Louis Weil. 1979. *Liturgy for Living*. New York: Seabury, 223-224.