

August 22, 2010

Scripture: Luke 13: 10-17

Sermon: "Freed on the Sabbath Day"

We continue our journey through the Gospel of Luke and it seems like for the past few weeks, the cost of discipleship gets heavier and heavier and we feel our backs stooping over just a little more. We have heard Jesus tell us as his disciples that we are to love as God loves and we feel the weight of these words on our shoulders. We have heard Jesus tell us as his disciples that we are to see our neighbors as our brothers and sisters and once again, we feel the weight of these words on our shoulders. We have heard Jesus tell us as his disciples that we are to trust in God, not our possessions and we feel the weight just a little more. And as we continue our journey through Luke, we try to shift the weight around, to shift the heavy cost of discipleship around to our backs, so we are just a little bit more comfortable as we journey to Jerusalem. And then as soon as we think we are comfortable, that we have our backpack of discipleship shifted in a way that makes for easier carrying, Jesus adds another package, another weight: He reminds us that we are called to live out our lives with the mentality that the Kingdom is happening now; that we are to live out the Kingdom is here but not yet in all our actions and our deeds as disciples.

And at this point, we realize that we are stooped over, with our backpack of discipleship, heavy upon our backs, and our foreheads almost touching our knees as we struggle under the weight to take another step with Jesus.

And then we come to today's Scripture and today we hear the good news: that we have been freed on this Sabbath Day; that our backpacks of discipleship are not meant to weigh us down or not meant to make us stoop over; that we are meant to stand straight up and rejoice with all the people of God that we have been set free.

And we find this lesson and this good news through the example of this healing of the stooped woman found only in the Gospel of Luke. And it is the last time that Jesus teaches in the synagogue before he enters into Jerusalem.

We hear in our Scripture today that Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, takes notice of this woman, calls her over and heals her. Nothing unusual or dramatic here. This is not the first time nor is it the last time that Jesus heals, nor is it the first or last time that he heals in a synagogue. So why does Luke share this story when no other Gospel does? Where's the drama? What makes this story so special? And to answer these questions, we have to understand that the concern, the drama, the uproar comes not because Jesus healed but because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, a sacred day, a day of rest.

The leadership of the church is in an uproar. "Jesus, you can't do that. Don't you know it is the Sabbath, a day of rest? Don't you know that there are rules? Jesus, come back tomorrow and heal her then she'll be in the same condition tomorrow. Tomorrow is a better day. She waited eighteen years to be healed. What's one day more?"

And Jesus responds by saying, "The Kingdom of God doesn't work that way. The Kingdom of God doesn't take a day of rest. The Kingdom of God doesn't care about the rules or regulations. All the Kingdom of God cares about is that a child of God is hurting and in need of care." The

Kingdom of God will not wait because there is no better time than right now for the Good News, there is no better time than right now for this child of God to be healed, there is no better time than right now for this child of God to be made whole.

Jesus asks the leadership, “Why all these rules and regulations that restricted, rule, even try to control the way God works? God simply told God’s people to love God with all your hear, with all your mind, and with all your soul and to love your neighbor as God loves you. The rules and regulations came later as a way to try to control God’s Kingdom here on earth, as a way to try to tame God’s Spirit, as a way of trying to control the mystery of God’s Kingdom. And these rules and regulations have become heavy burdens, have become heavy weights, these rules and regulations have turned God’s lessons of love into more like rulebook of who is in and who is who, into guidelines about the proper way to worship, into empty motions that have lost their meaning.

God’s Kingdom isn’t about rules and regulations. God’s kingdom is about being freed right here, right now, at this moment to experience God’s love and God’s graces. There is no proper or improper time for this because it is always the right time for the freeing news of the Kingdom of God.

Through this woman’s healing and restoring her the ability to stand straight again after eighteen years, Jesus is inviting us to understand that there is our time and then there is God’s time, to understand that there is our understanding of Sabbath and then there is God’s understanding of Sabbath, to understand that there is our way and then there is God’s way.

Jesus is challenging us to think outside the box. He is challenging us to let go of the things that prevent us from becoming the people that God created us to be. He is challenging us to see that we have created a system that has become burdensome rather than life-giving and life-renewing. Jesus is challenging us to open our eyes and see that the Kingdom of God is about freeing all of God’s people from the things that bind them, that oppress them. It is about removing the things that prevent us from becoming the people that God created us to be. God’s Kingdom is not about rules and regulations. It is about making God’s children whole and letting them experience God’s grace and God’s love.

Jesus is challenging us to let down our guard and to allow ourselves to be set free on this Sabbath day. He wants us to understand we have turned God’s lessons of love and discipleship into burdens rather than hearing them as Good News and experiencing new life. We have treated them like burdens. We placed the restrictions on our relationship with God. We have turned God’s life-freeing lessons into heavy weights and burdens to bear.

The challenge for us today is to allow this lesson to invite “all of us who seek to follow Jesus today to ponder the ways in which our own rules, systems, and habits of what is right and proper have in fact become “Bad News” [for all of God’s children].

We can’t be surprise that we have come to this point along our journey. Jesus has been upfront with us in the beginning. He told us that discipleship was not going to be easy. That sometimes, we might have to buck the system, that sometimes, being true to our faith might put us on opposites sides of our family, of our friends, of our communities of faith. He was upfront with us

in the beginning when he said if you follow me, we would have to leave behind our the things that we hold dear. He was upfront with us in the beginning when he said that he came to set the captives free and to bring good news to all of God's children.

But now, as it becomes more and more clear that we are not in control, we start to wonder if Jesus hasn't gone a little too far for our comfort. We start to question Jesus when he starts coloring outside the lines. We start to protest when Jesus pushes us out of comfort zone. "Jesus, it is only one day. What could it hurt to come back tomorrow and heal her then? It is just one day."

And so Jesus responds to all of our protests, to our questions, and our worrying by saying that even one day is too much when a child of God is hurting, one day is too long when a child of God is suffering, one day is too long when a child of God is in pain. Jesus turns the tables on us and invites us to really think about what he did that was so bad, why are we so bothered by the fact that Jesus won't play by the rules? A child of God is healed. He lifted off the burdens that held her captive for eighteen years. What's really wrong with that? And we realize nothing because the Good News is that a child of God has been made whole.

In our Scripture today, Jesus is inviting us "to break the bonds of our rules and regulations, to break the bonds of our empty obligations so that we might become authentic proclaimers of the Good News and truly experience the freedom, release and recovery of God's Kingdom here on earth.

And he does that by inviting us to truly understand the meaning of Sabbath. Immediately, we say, Sabbath is a day of rest. Immediately we say, God took a rest after creating the world in six days. Immediately we say, it is a day of relaxation where we don't do any work. And like any good teacher, Jesus says, Yes, but it is more than all that. Sabbath is a reminder that God brought wholeness and peace to God's creation because God controlled the Chaos. Sabbath is a reminder that God set us free the day we first believed and experienced God's love. Sabbath is more than a day in the week. It is a mentality, a vocation, a calling that we are to live out each and every day of our lives as a way of remember how God worked in our lives to free us, about what God has done for us. Sabbath is about renewal, about re-creation, about freedom.

Sabbath is a way of life, not a day in the week. And when it becomes a way of life, we realize that God's lessons of life, God's lessons of right relationship, God's lessons of trust frees us to become the people that God created us to be, frees us to live out the Good News in our lives, frees us to love as God loves.

When Jesus heals this woman, she becomes an example of someone who truly lives as a freed child of God. She rejoices. She is made whole. She finds peace. She is restored. She is renewed. And she carries this Sabbath mentality all the days of her lives as a child of God, forgiven, loved and free. She remembers that God is with her all the time, holding her in the palm of God's hand, that God made her whole.

And that is the Good News for all of us. We are free and God has made us whole. we are free, free to rejoice, free to share the Good News, free to say we worship our God, we serve our

community, we love our neighbors as God loves because God has made us whole. We can proclaim that the faith we live out is not filled with empty rules and regulations. We can proclaim that the faith we live out is not a religious obligation. We can proclaim that we do all these things as people because we remember that God worked and is continuing to work in our lives to bring us healing, to bring us hope, to bring us wholeness.

We live God's lessons of discipleship, not as burdens but as reminders that God first loved us, as reminders that God first saw us, as reminders that God first healed us, as reminders that God first made us whole.

The Good News is that the Sabbath is not just one day. It is a mentality that calls us to live out the Good news of freedom, of hope, of wholeness every day of our lives. The Good news is that we have been set free from the burdens that weight us down. The Good News is that we have been healed and are called to bring healing to all of God's children regardless of the rules and regulations that tell us to wait.

The Kingdom of God does not wait. The Kingdom of God doesn't know the meaning of the word wait until another day to do God's will. The Kingdom of God doesn't understand our boundary lines, our comfort zones, our guidelines. All the Kingdom of God understands is that one of God's children is hurting and now is the time to set them free and to share God's love.

And that is who we are called to be: Kingdom people here and now who live out God's Sabbath every day of our lives.

May we always celebrate that we were freed on this Sabbath Day. Amen.