

## “Release”

Luke 13: 10-16

Today, we are talking about the practice of Sabbath-keeping in relation to the word, “Release”. Now to just remind us of what exactly the Sabbath is, I want us to hear again these words from the theologian/pastor Eugene Peterson, words that I shared with everyone at the beginning of this series:

*“The great reality we are involved in is God. Most of the people around us don't know that and couldn't care less. One of the ways God has provided for us to stay aware of and responsive to him in a world that doesn't care is by Sabbath-keeping. At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate his, quit talking to each other and listen to him.”*

Notice those last two lines again: *At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate his, quit talking to each other and listen to him.”*

As we continue our conversation about Sabbath, we need to realize that the Sabbath is not just about taking one day to rest and renew. It is also a mind-set, a framework from which we live our lives as people of faith. In the Jewish tradition, Sabbath is also considered something we experience when we come face to face with the presence of God. It is a way for the people to remember the joy of the

Lord. It becomes a theological hope that gives the people “a foretaste of the time when God’s Kingdom would be realized here on Earth.” It is a promise given to the people of God that there would come a day when pain and suffering would be no more.

In Jewish tradition, Sabbath was and is a way for the people of God to show their commitment to community and to call all to be witnesses to the wholeness only found through God’s grace and God’s love.

And it still works the same way for us today. The Sabbath experience gives us an opportunity to step back and analyze what is keeping us bound, keeping us from becoming the people that God created and calls us to be. So for example, maybe we can take this opportunity and invite the practice of Sabbath-keeping to show us where fear and anger are keeping us captive, preventing the light of God from coming into our hearts. Or maybe we can take this experience of Sabbath to recognize that too often we let past hurts, past betrayals, past broken relationships hold us captive, never really letting go, never really allowing healing to happen for our hearts and spirits.

Or let me say it this way: As humans, we are fragile beings. We tend to pretend that everything is fine. We say nothing is wrong, while ignoring all the stuff, you know all that stuff that prevents us from being fully open to God’s

healing and wholeness, stuff like fear, anger, hurt, hate, worry, broken relationships, mistrust, bitterness. I could go on and on but I think we get the idea. We let this stuff build up inside ourselves, build up in our world until we can no longer recognize God's creation. Darkness takes over and soon we become so trapped that we can no longer recognize the image of God found within ourselves, found within other people. Then suddenly it all becomes too much and we break. Our hearts break from too much hurt. Our spirits break from too much pain. Our bodies break from trying to keep the peace. Our very world breaks from too much darkness and hate.

Soon we reach a point where we are not well, either physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally or communally. Soon we are all held as captives by the darkness, finding ourselves confined and bound, ignoring the light of God that is around us, surrounding us, offering us hope and new life. Soon we are captives, trapped in the dark.

We have to know that this is not how God intended for us to live, to be held captive day in and day out by bitterness, to be held captive day in and day out by pain. God did not intend for us to be held captive day in and day out by the brokenness and hate that fills our world. From the very beginning, God wanted for us, gave to us a life full of joy, full of laughter, full of love and grace. God never ever intended for us to be held captive with no hope of release.

That's why I am always surprised when I read this story. I am always surprised that the leaders have the audacity to tell this woman to wait one more day, to say "What's the big deal? She can come back tomorrow and be healed." I am always surprised that the leaders in this story cannot see the damage they are doing by asking this woman to wait one more day for release from her pain and suffering.

That is until I look in the mirror or take a look around at the world and realize that all too often I ask, we as the church ask, the wider culture ask the same thing. Too often we ask the people who are being held captive by brokenness, by the bitterness, being held captive by the hate found in our world to wait one more day for release, to wait one more day to be made whole, all for the sake of keeping the peace.

Because that's what we think is important. We tell ourselves that our job, our calling is to keep the peace and if we do that, then everyone will be happy. So, thinking our job, our calling is to keep the peace and maintain the status quo, we remain silent towards the racism, sexism, ageism, all the isms that fill our world. We remain silent towards all the hurt, the fear, the anger that fills our world. Unfortunately, by trying to keep the peace and maintain the status quo, we remain silent towards the oppression and the devaluing of humankind that is overtaking over our world.

No longer are we able to see each other as made in the image of God. We can only see people as objects, as things to hurt, as things to hate, as things to destroy.

Too often when we come face to face with the darkness that is tearing our communities, our world, even ourselves apart, too often we find ourselves saying, “Can you just come back tomorrow? There is no reason this healing of body, mind and soul has to be done today.” Too often, we find ourselves saying, “Come back tomorrow. Maybe by then we will be ready to do something about the darkness. Maybe by then, we will be ready to make some changes in how we live, in how we relate to one another, in how we respect one another. Maybe by then we will be willing to release you from whatever it is that keeps you hostage. But for now, you are just going to have to wait. We need to keep the peace. We need to maintain status quo ,even if it is an unhealthy and harmful to all of God’s children.”

But you see, that’s the power of the Sabbath. That’s the power of the Kingdom of God. The in-breaking of God shatters this unhealthy peace and forces us, yes I said forces us to deal with the fear and anger, deal with the hurt and hate, forces us to acknowledge the bitterness and brokenness that is slowly destroying our world.

By shattering the unhealthy peace we all strive to maintain, the experience of Sabbath puts us face to face with God and forces us to begin the hard work of releasing the captives, freeing the oppressed and reclaiming the image of God found in ourselves and in everyone else as well.

Sabbath is about addressing the needs and dignity of all people and inviting us to embrace a new understanding of peace, peace that can only be found when God's Kingdom is realized here on earth. Sabbath is about us as the people of God putting into practice God's mercy, putting into practice God's compassion through our words and actions so that all people who are suffering and in need will be set free.

So in our story, when Jesus heals the woman, in spite of what the leaders say or think, Jesus is actually practicing Sabbath. He is taking time to listen to the voice of God, stop his work and begin God's work. Jesus is honoring the Sabbath the only way he knows how: by providing new life to a child of God and renewing her spirits. Jesus is practicing the Sabbath on that day and here's why: As he talks with leadership of the synagogue, Jesus is not advocating that we should be able to do whatever we want to do. Jesus is not ignoring the law. Quite the opposite in fact.

Jesus recognizes that at all times as the people of God our words and actions must reflect the character and nature of our God. And at no time is God okay with people being oppressed, being held captive, being separated from the life of joy and love that God intends for all of God's children. So in reality, despite what the leaders think or say, Jesus was living out the heart and intention of the Law by advocating the same freeing "work" that God did for the people when God released the people from captivity. If we remember in the Exodus story, God saw the people in pain. God saw the people being oppressed. God saw the people being used and abused. God saw them trapped in darkness and set them free.

What Jesus does through his practice of Sabbath is to release this woman from the captivity of pain that confined her. And in doing so, this woman becomes a living sign of God's deliverance, freeing her to be the person God created her and called her to be. Just like we are called to do for all of God's children today and all days.

Now, I fully admit, this is that moment in the sermon where a really good sermon illustration would bring the point but I'll be honest, I couldn't find one. Unfortunately, as I reviewed headlines and had conversations with people, I found more stories of captivity than release. I found way too many examples of how the systems of our world keep people oppressed and held captive. I found way too many examples of how fear and anger are keeping our communities confined and

trapped. I found way too many examples of how people hold on to broken relationships and past hurts, preventing them from living the life God intended for them, as Beloved Children of God, made whole.

Unfortunately, as the week continued, I found way too many examples of people, including me saying to all those who are confined and bound by hate and hurt, saying, “Can’t you just come back tomorrow to be made well? One more day isn’t going to hurt you.”

As I have lived with this text this past week, as I looked for stories of hopeful life giving release from captivity, all I could find were story after story of the damage that really is done when we wait too long to find release for all of God’s peoples from the fears, from the anger, from the hurt, from the bitterness, from all the brokenness. Unfortunately this past week, there were too many stories of what can happen, what does happen when we as people of faith don’t have the courage to say, “No, this healing and wholeness, this release from the pain and hurt cannot wait. It must be experienced here and now for all God’s people.”

As people of faith, as ones who have been set free from the darkness, we can no longer ask others to wait to be healed, to be made whole. We can no longer ask people to wait to be released from the darkness that holds them captive.



Now is the time to act. Because you see, Jesus didn't wait for this woman to ask to be set free. He didn't wait until he had permission from the powers that be. Jesus didn't wait until for the majority agree and then take a vote.

Jesus saw this woman, recognized her as a child of God, made in the image of God. Jesus saw this woman as one named and claimed by a God who loves her more than she could ever imagine and he acted, responding to the Kingdom of God in their midst.

Jesus released her from her captivity and restoring her and making her whole.

Jesus saw this woman and refused to keep the unhealthy peace. He refused to maintain the status quo any longer. Because he realized at that ever did was keep all people hostage and prevents everyone from living out the life of joy, the life of love God intended for all of God's children.

In that very moment of release, Jesus forces this particular community of faith to realize that our job is not keeping the peace or maintain the status quo. He showed the leaders and he shows us as well that when we encounter the presence of God, our job, our calling becomes very clear. We are called to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captive and to let the oppressed go free. Just as it has always been since the beginning of time.

As ones who worship a Risen Savior, we know that there is new life after death, that there is hope after darkness, that there is healing and wholeness, there is release from the stuff that prevents us from being the people God created us to be, the people that calls us to be, the people the world needs us to be.

So why are we keeping this release a secret?! Isn't it time the rest of the world knows about this amazing life-giving gift that God intends for all of God's children?

We are called, not to maintain the status quo, but called to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's children. Now is the time to act. Now is the time to show the world that love will always overcome, that there is hope beyond the darkness, that there is release from all the hate and hurt that holds us hostage. Now is the time to embrace being the people God created us to be, Beloved Children of God made whole.

May we have the courage and the strength to live out our calling as disciples of the Risen Lord, as ones who are called to bring release to the captives and set the oppressed free. May it be so. Amen.

