

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Our gospel story today is one of several where Jesus heals on the Sabbath. In Luke 6 (and Mark 3:1-6), and Luke 13 we read about other Sabbath healings - Jesus healing a man with a withered hand and the story of a man with dropsy. In both of these, Jesus is also opposed by religious leaders.

In today's reading, the woman with a crippled back did not even ask to be healed; Jesus sees her in the synagogue, calls her over, lays his hands on her and says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." She immediately stands up straight and begins praising the Lord. What a relief this must have been for the woman. For 18 years she was probably not able to look upwards, or to work with such an affliction, so probably had to rely on family and friends to support her. No wonder she praised the Lord!

But Jesus chooses to heal on the sabbath, the one day it was forbidden. One gospel commentator says that Jesus, “to confirm the doctrine he preached, and to recommend it as faithful, and well worthy of acceptance, he performed a miracle, a miracle of mercy.”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, despite the miracle of healing – the leader of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had, yet again, cured someone on the sabbath. It was as if Jesus had committed an awful crime, in healing this poor woman. No compassion for the woman who finally been released from her infirmity. Anyone would think that the miracle should have convinced the leader that the healing was completely justified, even though it happened on the sabbath. But he chose instead to focus on the letter of the law and could not see beyond the rules; not even thanking Jesus for saving the woman from her miserable bent over life.

The leader does not even have the courage to speak directly to Jesus about his breaking of rules; perhaps because he knows that Jesus, in the past, has often verbally torn the authorities to shreds. But the leader says to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." The leader makes light of the miracle that just happened in front of him, as if it was a matter of course. He suggests instead that people can come any other day of the week and be healed. Christ's cures had become, in the leader's eyes, commonplace, and not that astounding miracle they were.

The leader doesn't show an ounce of empathy for the woman, who was crippled and probably in pain for a good part of her life. Just, stick to the sabbath rules Jesus. But the leader is stretching the law beyond its intention by making the act of healing, either by a touch of the hand or a word spoken, to be interpreted as 'work' which is forbidden on the sabbath. The healing was the work of God, and God is not prevented from works of healing on any day.

The Law of Moses in the Fourth Commandment, coming from God in the Ten Commandments, prohibits work on the sabbath. That's because God rested from creating the world on the seventh day and commands that it is kept holy. No-one works on that day, not even animals. This law makes it possible for people to rest on one day of the week and not be expected to work seven days. Jesus says in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath.” In other words, ‘the law was made for man not man for the law.’ The law simply allowed people to have a break from unceasing labour – it was meant to help them.

Jesus' response to the leader's criticism was first to call him a hypocrite. I'm sure that didn't go down well, given the leader's position of authority. Then Jesus makes the logical point to the crowd, that cattle are watered

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<sup>1</sup> [Matthew Henry's Commentary](#)

on the sabbath day. It was common practice among the Jews to untie the animals and lead them to water – it was a practice never forbidden. It would be inhumane not to do it, because a man who has mercy cares about the lives of his animals who work for him. Letting animals rest on the sabbath, and not move anywhere, as the law directed, would be worse than working them.

Jesus says to the crowd, “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? And 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?” The effect of these words on the crowd was instant - they now had full support for Jesus, healing the woman. He had shown that not only was it lawful, but it highly appropriate to heal this poor woman on the sabbath. But all the adversaries of Jesus – the leader and others in authority, were ashamed. They were silenced, but [full of indignation](#), and they didn’t have a word of reply.

But what of us? What would the life of our community looked like if we also saw and touched those in need, regardless of the day of the week? Where do we see people bent over and crippled in body or mind, hurting? Where do we see crooked, bent and oppressive systems in our society? What would it take for us to acknowledge, see and touch those in a way that makes a difference to their lives. To be the one to touch another’s life with love, compassion, hope, or encouragement? Just as Jesus did. I wonder what our world would look like then?

God in Christ does wonderful things – both then, and also today. We have much reason to be joyful and thankful.

AMEN