HOMILY FOR WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH, 2026 / LUKE 13: 10 – 17
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Before I speak about our Gospel reading this evening, you may have noticed in your leaflet that today is appointed in our lectionary as a memorial day for the Saints of the Hebrew Scripture. Actually the lectionary reads Saints of the Old Testament. Many contemporary Christians reject the use of the terms Old and New Testaments because Old and New suggest replacement or supersession and are closely aligned with centuries of vicious antisemitism. I was actually surprised to see Old Testament used in the lectionary.

The whole point of setting a memorial day for the holy people who existed from creation is to emphasize the continuity of those who have been faithful and proclaimed God's salvation until the present day. The western church has not applied the term Saint individually to figures from before the birth of Jesus. You will never hear of St. Moses or St. Ruth except in the Orthodox Church. But the sanctity of Patriarchs, Prophets and Leaders, and individuals like David, Ruth, Job, and Esther has always been recognized by the church. You will recall that in the Apostle's Creed among other things we say *He descended to the dead*. *On the third day he rose again*. Traditional Christian Theology believes that Jesus' descent was for the purpose of opening the gates of heaven for the faithful people who had gone before him on earth. They were described as waiting in the bosom of Abraham to be delivered by the Messiah. You may recall the spiritual, Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham.

The term Saint was first applied to individuals who lived during Jesus' earthly life. For example, St. John the Evangelist, St. Mary

the Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Mary Magdalene, and the apostles. The Anglican church has never created a process for canonization, but it continues to venerate Saints created before the reformation and it recognizes particularly holy people who have existed between the reformation and the near present on particular days of the liturgical calendar. For example, on April 16, Mollie Brant, Matriarch among the Mohawks is commemorated.

Last point on saints before I go on to the Gospel reading. The church venerates particular individuals as Saints with a capital S, but the church regards the entire body of the baptized as saints with a lower-case s.

Let's turn to the Gospel reading. This evening's Gospel from Luke is similar in theme to the Gospel readings we have had on the last several Sundays from Matthew – hypocrisy and rigid rule following instead of compassion.

A few things in our passage worthy of note:

1. **The woman was coming to worship without expectation. It was Jesus who saw her. She asked for nothing, how could she, she was bent over and would have been unable to hold her head up to see around her.**
2. **Her first reaction to being able to stand up straight was to praise God.**
3. **The leader of the synagogue voiced his indignation to the crowd, not directly to Jesus.**

4. **He regarded Jesus laying hands on the woman to cure and allow her to stand up straight after 18 long years as forbidden work not compassion, restoration, and inclusion.**

As we heard so many times in our recent readings from Matthew on Sundays. Jesus immediately calls the Leader of the Synagogue out on his hypocrisy. *"You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water?"*

There is more to Jesus healing of the woman that just enabling her to physically stand up straight. She was now able to stand up straight figuratively in society. In those times and in some circles still today people with afflictions were thought to deserve them as marks of some kind of sin with the affliction the punishment. Jesus says immediately after calling out the hypocrisy, *"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?"* In calling the woman a daughter of Abraham Jesus emphasizes her worthiness and full place in the world.

Just imagine, if I keeled over right now, would your response be, "Well he could at least have finished the homily first" or perhaps "Oh thank God, I don't have to listen to any more of that." No you'd come to my aid. The Leader of the Synagogue would have urged you retake your seats because you were disrupting the service.

I wonder if any of you have read Sir Compton Mackenzie's book Whisky Galore. It is based on a true story of a cargo ship during

the second world war that very early on a Sunday morning goes aground on a reef off a pair of islands called the Toddays. Great Todday is entirely Presbyterian, Little Todday is Roman Catholic. The Presbyterians are of course strict Sabbatarians. All they can do on a Sunday is go to church and stay home with the blinds drawn reading their Bibles. The Romans on Little Todday have no such constraints. The ship is in danger of sliding off the reef and sinking to the depths together with its entire cargo of cases and cases of whisky. The men of little Todday get a salvage operation underway immediately. The men of Great Todday spend a day in abject frustration. They are out at the first stroke of midnight. How much prayer and self-reflection do you imagine they accomplished on that long ago sabbath day?

We are all old enough to remember all the things we weren't allowed to do on a Sunday. I think we can be sure that frustration didn't lead to much in the way of spiritual contemplation. In the Scotland of my childhood you weren't allowed to buy a drink on a Sunday unless you were a traveller. To be a traveller you had to travel at least three miles. So the men of one village would meet the men of another village half-way in between as they went in quest of *uisge-beatha* the water of life. I don't imagine there was much praying went on during those sabbath journeys.

Jesus calls out the leader of the synagogue on being entirely fixated on assuring that appearance conformed to rules with no regard to the sincerity of that obedience. As long as I come to church with a pious looking face, stand and sit at the appropriate times, and carefully ignore any questionable behaviour on the

part of others like crying or being obviously cast down I have worshiped. Nonsense! I would have behaved like the leader of the synagogue who waters his animals on the sabbath, but decries mercy and compassion as work that cannot be performed until Monday.

As I said three Sundays ago, Jesus asks us to bring our inward and outward selves into alignment in the service of God and neighbour.

Amen