

Sermon on Luke 13:10-17

Sundays, do you ever wonder what they're really about? Whether we're here or not, Sunday will come; in another seven days another Sunday will be here. Today's Gospel reading tackles that question head on. In one way we can see this as a clash between two understandings of the law. The synagogue leader takes very seriously and literally the many laws about keeping the Sabbath. But Jesus is nudging the people to look beneath the surface and into the deeper meaning of these laws to see that they are about the welfare of those in need. These laws aren't to be kept just to keep them, but for the greater good they serve. So if keeping the law stops you from caring for someone in need, then the choice is easy—you break the law to fulfill it.

But it goes much deeper than this; it concerns the very point of the day itself. I didn't know until reading for this sermon that there are two traditions concerning the Sabbath. One is recorded in Exodus 20 and links the Sabbath to the first creation account in Genesis where God rests after six days of labor. Because God rested we too should rest from our labors; our households and even our animals.

The second tradition is in Deuteronomy 5 and links the Sabbath to the Exodus and to freedom, to liberty, to release from bondage and captivity. This is the tradition that Jesus is referencing when he reminds his listeners when other instances of releasing, untying, and setting free are allowed by law. He then goes on to describe this woman's condition as being "bound by Satan." Jesus seems to be saying of course it's alright to set someone free on the Sabbath because

the Sabbath is all about freedom! The Sabbath or Sunday reminds us that we have been captive and set free. It invites us to look around and see who else is still bound and needs to be free.

Martin Luther reminds us that we are freed from sin, death and the power of the devil and set free for service to our neighbor. The Sabbath isn't just for the Lord, but also for those of us that need rest, renewal, and release. Is it little wonder that Christians moved their day of celebration from Sabbath to Sunday—the day that God raised Christ from the grave and released us from the bondage of death!

But do we see Sunday as a day of freedom or do we view it as a day of obligation. This day is more than what we can do for God in giving thanks and praise. It's also about what God can do for us and for others. What if Sunday was about remembering what great acts of release that God has already done for us so that we can be encouraged to dare to do mighty acts ourselves? What if Sunday were a day to remember that God has already freed us from death itself so that we don't have to be afraid of anything so that we can share our Christian courage with others?

This past year the Men's group and I read and discussed the book, "Heaven Is for Real" which tells the wonderful story about a young boy's visit to heaven where he meets Jesus, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and other family members. It's a beautiful and compelling story for the existence of heaven as a reality. There's just one thing; I neglected to ask them the "so what?" question. How does knowing that heaven is for real affect how you live your life?

If it makes you want to just concentrate on the perfect life you'll have once you get there and insulate yourself from the messiness of our life here; then I'm sorry we read it. But if it encourages you to be bold in your Christian life, as the resurrection of Jesus helped the early Christians to take chances to help others and spread the good news of Jesus Christ even if it meant the loss of family, friends, employment or even life itself; then I'm glad we read it.

The early Christian church grew because of the deep belief the Christians had in the resurrection and promises of Jesus. They boldly spoke out about their faith and helped others who were sick and neglected when most people would have left them to die for fear of getting sick and dying themselves. The early Christians knew that they too could become sick and die or be put to death for their beliefs, but their hope and knowledge of the life to come gave them the courage to act boldly!

We here today are still broken and bound. Some of us are bound by disease and others by fear. These fears are very real especially when we realize that we have little control in our lives. But can we take the time; especially on Sunday mornings during worship to remember the mighty acts that God has done in our lives and be emboldened to step out in faith to take care of the people and world that God loves enough to die for. Take a few minutes now to remember those times of release that God has already accomplished in our lives and then take a few more minutes in prayer to ask God for release from those things that still bind us.