

## Rejoicing At All the Wonderful Things

**Luke 13:10-17**

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Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

In our passage for this morning, Jesus speaks to the deepest meaning of the Sabbath, that weekly day of rest that had reinforced the identity of Jesus' own people, the children of Israel, for centuries before his birth. He comes to the subject through a series of healings and teachings around those healings in the gospel of Luke. Our passage for this morning is one example. This was Jesus' way, to teach through stories, through healings, through personal experiences, and through considered dialogue with those around him.

By these means he provoked the people's deepest thoughts and feelings, to draw them into a new way of life he intended for them. And that is precisely what he does in our passage from Luke for this morning. He helps us see a holy observance in a different light. He speaks to the freedom and release of Sabbath, and what it means to be healed on such a day.

Let us pray:

*Loving Father, you have promised that your yoke is easy and your burden is light through Christ. Yet we load many heavy burdens on ourselves and on each other. Help us to find solace, balm, and rest in you through the ministry of your Son Jesus. Equip us to move beyond our own familiar understandings toward fresh insight and knowledge for how you would have us live. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I want to begin this morning by walking us through at least four instances in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus heals on the Sabbath day, where Jesus puts the needs of a human being foremost in the minds of those around him on the day of rest. At the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus' disciples are walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath and they are hungry. So they pluck some of that grain, crumble it in their hands, and eat it. The authorities immediately object, insisting such work is prohibited on the Sabbath.

But then Jesus reminds them how, centuries before, David entered the house of God and ate bread which was only lawful for the priests to eat. "The son of Man is lord of the Sabbath," he told them.

The second example follows immediately after the first one in chapter 6. It is another Sabbath story where Jesus goes to a synagogue on that holy day and heals a man with a withered hand. This gets the religious folks all twisted up in a knot. Verse 11 says, "...they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."

In the third example, in chapter 13 of Luke, we have the account for this morning's worship service, when on the Sabbath Jesus heals the woman who is bent over, presumably from an injury or from disease to her bones. Then in chapter 14, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath who suffers from dropsy. By this point, after all of these healings, all of these humanitarian efforts on the holy day of Sabbath, he has done so much healing on what they consider "the wrong day" that the people around him and the religious authorities are speechless. They do not know what to say.

I take time this morning to talk us through those four examples in the gospel of Luke because I think it is important for us to notice how Jesus repeatedly uses the Sabbath to teach us about the Kingdom of God which he is drawing us into day by day without respect to human schedules or restraints.

It goes beyond what might be popularly believed about Jesus and his ministry: that Jesus did not believe in the rules, or Jesus was anti-tradition, or Jesus was anti-establishment. None of those things is really true about Jesus. Such statements are artificial boxes.

No, what is true is that Jesus is getting at something bigger here that shapes the way we live as disciples even today and addresses our longing for a kind of healing and rest that cannot be satisfied by even a day off, a vacation, or catching up on sleep some Saturday morning, as good and as sweet as all those things are.

No, Jesus is getting at the assurance we discover in the knowledge that he is the Lord of life and indeed the Lord of the Sabbath. Through our faith in him, we discover his power to release us from the burdens of our lives. This assurance, indeed this fact, is a healing balm, a rest, a comfort, a strength -- no matter the day of the week.

In him we find a freedom we cannot find anywhere else. This is what the passage gets to when, in verse 17, Luke reports, "all the crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things he was doing." They saw something new in this man and in his ministry.

I had a mentor years ago, to whom I went with many doubts about the faith. And he patiently listened to my well-considered questions about Christian doctrines and traditions. Perhaps you have had someone like this in your own walk of faith who sat patiently with you to hear all of your doubts, all of your wonder, who sat through all of that with you and was a blessing to you in such a time.

In one such time, when I was asking so many questions of him, when I was really searching for answers, he replied to me by saying, "Doug, the answer to all of your questions is not a proposition for you to ponder or debate. The answer to your questions is a person. Come to know him, come to know his presence, come to know his character, come to know his way, and you will know the truth."

Friends, Sabbath is not only an observance or a day. Sabbath is a person. Connect with that person, and you will find rest for your soul. Then the question of what is allowed on any one day of the week may seem small compared to the knowledge that he is Lord and the knowledge of what the Lord can do on any day!

All our questions of faith and observance are clarified in the light of Jesus' steadfast love and Lordship. And when we live in that light, we rejoice in God's wonderful works no matter the day, no matter the hour.

Jesus reconnects his people with the deeper meaning of Sabbath, which is a celebration of God's goodness, provision, and blessing for his people. Sabbath is a practice for the liberation of his people and not for their control, arbitrarily exercised.

He does not reject observance of the Sabbath. Rather he is concerned that his people enjoy the Sabbath for all that it is worth. Sabbath is for the liberation of God's people. So what is the problem with Jesus healing this woman on that holy day? Her healing by Jesus' hand is the rest that she has longed for over 18 years. And not only is this not the wrong day for such a healing, it is precisely the right day.

It is Jesus' presence on that day that makes it right. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and the Lord's work cannot be contained by hours in a day. In fact, his work redeems those hours and fills them with fresh purpose. The Kingdom of God continues to come, changing us and reframing our basic assumptions about who God is and how we are called to please him.

The whole question for how to observe the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, is an interesting one for those of us who work on Sundays, people like pastors, many of whom try to take Monday or another day off during the week for rest.

Since I have been in the ministry, Sunday night has always felt to me what Friday night probably feels like to most people: when you have the sense you have given everything that you could give in a week and you give yourself permission not to do any more, even if for a few hours.

For years during my first pastorate in Michigan, my wife and I would get together regularly on Sunday evenings with another pastor and his wife, by the name of Jack and Betsy. We would come together for dinner. Betsy had a marvelous gift of hospitality to welcome people into her home, and Jack had a

marvelous talent for cooking international meals. Both of them still have these gifts for which I give great thanks.

We would gather at five or six and stay up laughing and talking until eleven or past eleven, knowing Monday was our day off; so we did not have to worry about getting up early for the next day's work.

When I think of Sabbath, I think of those Sunday evenings when I felt release from the responsibilities of the week. Freed, if you will, to do nothing else but enjoy the blessings of God with friends. In fact, to this day when I hear the word *Sabbath*, the first picture that comes to my mind is the glow of candles around that dining room table. And I feel at rest, no matter the time or day when that image comes to mind.

Some might say that that is my "my quiet place." And I am sure each of you have experienced such moments in your own life in which you felt freed from the daily burdens of life and took comfort in the fact that God was providing for you.

What I also remember from Jack and Betsy's dining room was a small painting, perhaps six by nine inches, not very large, in a corner on the wall, created by an artist friend of theirs. The title of that painting was "Sabbath." I think it is no mistake that they hung it on the wall of their dining room where so many Sabbath meals were shared.

That painting was very, very simple. It was a picture of what appeared to be a young woman falling from somewhere above, a snap-shot of her in mid-air, back down and hands and feet and hair all flying upward toward the frame. And on her face was an expression of absolute joy, an expression as if she did not have a care in the world. She had the appearance of an autumn leaf that had just been released from the branch. Her image was framed so your eye was drawn to that look of release on her face.

When I saw that painting I could not figure out why I was so drawn to it until I realized this young woman was not bracing for a landing. What was beneath her, how hard or soft it would be, was the farthest thing from her mind. There was no tension in her body. She was completely in the moment, absorbed in the sensation of that very second in time. What was ahead of her and what was behind her, what was above her and what was beneath her, mattered not a bit. She was released; she was free.

This is Sabbath; to experience such healing freedom through our faith in Jesus that we live with an attitude, a disposition, of faith and trust in him, that we can carry into each and every day's decisions and even into each and every day's work.

There is one more passage from the Gospel of Luke that I did not read yet. It is found in chapter 4, verse 16. It is that scene where Jesus goes to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He unrolls the scroll from Isaiah, and he reads it aloud:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down...Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

The Sabbath is a person, and his name is Jesus. His yoke is easy. His burden is light.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us rejoice and be glad in him.

Let us pray:

*Lord, when we get weighed down by heavy burdens, imposed by others or imposed on ourselves, please turn us back to Jesus. When we go searching for answers in pages, propositions or positions, take us back to Jesus. When we make rules we cannot possibly follow ourselves, place our hand in Jesus' hand, and have us follow where he leads. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

