

SEQUOYAH HILLS

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Experiencing God through the Sabbath: Sharing”

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Psalm 131:2-3 and Luke 13:10-17

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At Sequoyah Church, we are about to wrap up our preaching series on “*Experiencing God through the Sabbath*”. Before we get into today’s second reading about the Sabbath, let’s note the greater Biblical context. There’s a problem and it’s getting worse! Tension is building, as Jesus moves towards Jerusalem. For several chapters, Luke intensifies stories with him getting into conflicts. The journey to the holy city is geographical, but more so a theological one. It’s not going to be easy, to say the least.

Through our Lord’s teachings, the disciples are also being prepared for their journey to Jerusalem. For that matter, so are we. Our congregation, along with Christians all over the world, will soon be re-enacting some of the events of Jesus’ final week from Palm Sunday, to Maundy Thursday, to Good Friday, and to Easter.

Before we get to Jerusalem, though, theologically and metaphorically, we, like Jesus and his early followers, must face some challenging realities. Among them, asking ourselves what’s holding us back from following God’s plan today.

Leading into this morning’s reading, Luke records Jesus performing a healing of a man’s withered hand. It was on the Sabbath. Luke then records the healing of a crippled woman, also on the Sabbath. Both generated conflict for Jesus, yet his determination of deep and accurate understanding of the Sabbath law was steadfast. He was, and is, about giving LIFE and HOPE, not *diminishing* LIFE or HOPE.

Both healings illustrate that Jesus addresses the hold that is on us. He brings good news worth sharing. Let’s listen in, as Luke describes the scene, Luke 13:10-17:

¹⁰ Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And just then, there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years.

She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’

*¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and **began praising God.** ¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.’*

¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! 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? ¹⁶ 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?’

*¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the **entire crowd was rejoicing** at all the wonderful things that he was doing.*

We long to be "freed" from all types of bindings, often physical ones. For example, some hunger for relief of: migraines, addictions, or chronic illness. Others long for mental freedom, such as a loved one not to be plagued: by intrusive, suicidal, or depressed thoughts. In some way or another, most of us, (at any given moment), are eager to move from slavery to freedom, from emotional, social, or spiritual things that get a hold of us: fear, doubt, and regret.

With our ancestral roots in faith back as far as Genesis, we've seen this narrative before: God's people are in trouble; God saves. Still, after learning this lesson, we often slip back into anxious living. God, though, gives the Sabbath to remember. Remember: we have a history of salvation, we are sustained by compassionate, providential care, and we are a part of a covenant community.

One of the biggest problems within our church family seems to be the struggle of how to turn off. Over and over, I hear laments of being overscheduled and overworked—and exhausted as a result. That could be with demanding careers, big obligations in organizations or activities, including Church, or responsibilities to those under our care. Then, for those looking after children, add in relentless routines (often self-imposed) of shuttling to this or that lesson or activity, practice, or game... and it all becomes too much! Many of us can sense the need to scale back but feel unequipped to do so.

Rest, especially resting in God, is different than simple escape or just lazy inactivity. It involves some self-discipline to block, for a time, all the other distractions that lead us to think... it all depends on us. God provided for the early Israelites and provides for us, too. The story of the Exodus illustrates this. The preamble to the 10 commandments gives the context and urgency for the new rule God wants to bring in. God says, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery* (Ex. 20:2). God led them from Pharaoh's slave-driving self-centered grip, giving them a better way to live. God nullifies that entire system of anxious production. Before the apostle Paul would ever declare it, God was saying "the old life is gone, a new life has begun." LIVE by following MY ways, MY commands. God's empathy breaks through our chaos and gives hope.

Jesus frees us/loosens/unties us, rather than letting us remain confined. His rule to follow isn't full of regulations or impossible demands, although some have and still do make it that way. If

Jesus can unburden/loose/free us from physical confinements/bindings, then he can do likewise with other types of restrictions.

I have a friend who sent me the longest text I've ever gotten. In it, they shared how they'd *forgiven* their spouse for unfaithfulness, but couldn't seem to *forget* about it. They were handcuffed by the memory; really plagued, as you can imagine! They needed to be freed/liberated from the nightmare of the spouse's sin. We've prayed together, talked, and texted so many times. Like the woman from Luke's story, hunched over for nearly two decades, my friend is working on year two, but still struggling to shake it and keep the marriage upright.

Jesus graciously declares that the crippled woman '*has been freed* from what overwhelmed.' Note the verb tense. God liberated. Not "will," but past tense "has" liberated her. God freed her from what had a hold on her. I wonder what has a hold on you? What are you slave to? God says, NO MORE!

It's amazing grace to realize that God has brought such healing to us! From Isaiah 53, which is so powerful, especially this time of the year, we're reminded, on the cross "*by his stripes, we are healed.*" We ARE healed! So, living into that reality is good news and an invitation to realize it. We've been set free. (Yes, we will still have dark valleys, but not alone)

If you're like me, you may be wrestling with the larger concept of Jesus' healing miracles and why hasn't so-and-so been healed. That's a difficult theological question that has been asked many times for 2,000+ years. A conundrum more than I can answer in one sermon, even if I knew how.

What I do know is Jesus heals with a deeper healing beyond a surface one. He truly declares that the woman was healed. Better off, she straightens up, not completely overcome, and praises God!

Fortunately, God is more concerned about her well-being than the religious observance of his keeping-or-not-keeping the law (based upon how it had been traditionally interpreted). Jesus is into *mercy over mandate* and *relationship over religion*. He prioritizes the *relationship*, over following the *religious* code. Not to abolish the law, but to set it right. At first, the Pharisees are more disturbed about his healing on the Shabbat, but then no longer can overlook their own sin of breaking the Shabbat. When Jesus points out that they were guilty of breaking the Sabbath, ALL realize their shame and need for a healer, for a Savior. We could take a lesson from that.

It's possible, that we can think we are well. That we have not broken any of God's laws. Actually, we are all crippled, stooping over with the weight of sin! If we're wise, we know we need the Great Physician. We need to let God free us from this problem. And, God does! In fact, Jesus invites us to be healed on a regular basis. Weekly. Over and over! Because we can quickly forget and abandon our Savior's liberation. When we don't include a rest day or even a rest hour, we can get more and more limited. Bent over. Feel overwhelmed. The remedy, though, is having a regular rhythm of rest to *remember*. To recall GOD is in charge. God convicts and mercifully hears our confession with the returning rhythm to sit with God in: prayer, unburdening, and hope-seeking. To be still with God, so there's no other place we'd rather be. There, you feel at home with yourself. There you find peace. This is the gift we need. A gift waiting to be unwrapped.

Fredrick Buechner says, "Sometimes it is only when you happen to taste a crumb of Sabbath that you dimly realize what it is that you are hungry for." When we're "observing the Sabbath to keep it holy," don't you think it changes others around us? It surely does. All of those closest to us can be edified. Our re-formation can be for others' gain also. God's intention was that Sabbath was more than individual rejuvenation. It is a *communal* observance to be shared; mutually bearing one another's burdens... mutually at Church. In doing so, we discover God is in our midst.

When we serve as a compassionate witness to someone's crippling, the ground becomes holy. "Just by being present with someone, we show them that they are not alone. We tangibly exhibit some of God's love by allowing God to work through us. Sabbath is really about relationships; connecting with God and realizing we are commissioned to help others feel beloved. Sure, in our Sabbath, we can have some time of solitude, like our Lord did- often going off to a deserted place- but we're designed to "live, move, and have our being" with others.

Today's passage ends by saying, "and the **entire crowd was rejoicing** at all the wonderful things that Jesus was doing". Our Savior provides a wonderful rest. A way of hope and good, not only for our renewal but also for the benefit of others. Live into God's new reign by following God's model, receiving God's gift that what holds us... has been taken off!

Let's share God's goodness all of our days!

Benediction:

Tension builds within us and our society, but our Savior provides a non-anxious way to rest. A way of hope and good not only for our renewal but also for the benefit of others. Let's live into God's new reign by following God's model, receiving God's gift- that what holds us has been taken off. Amen.