



# SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Sermon for Sunday, August 25, 2019

*The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost*

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Isaiah 58:9b-14 | Psalm 103:1-8 | Hebrews 12:18-29 | Luke 13:10-17

Some years ago, it was fashionable in some of the lighter-hearted Christian circles, when one was faced with a decision to make about something, to ask, "What would Jesus do?" The question evidently goes back to his own time, as we see in today's Gospel story. One of the things our elder brothers and sisters, observant Jews, are still required to do is attend the synagogue on the Sabbath, and to abstain from work, observing that day as a day of rest. But what Jesus does in today's reading is not what the congregation thought he would do. They expected teaching. He outrages the leader of the synagogue where he was teaching on the Sabbath by healing a crippled member of the congregation. You don't work on the sabbath even now in Orthodox Judaism, and evidently healing could then by some be considered working.

The woman in this story Luke tells us appears while Jesus is teaching. She is late to the service, and we can see why: she is unable to walk upright, and has some bad foot trouble as well. But she struggled to get there, even late, and in Luke's meticulous narrative observation, Jesus notices her painful entrance, and heals her without being asked to do so.

Throughout the Gospel stories, Jesus manages to get himself into frequent trouble by healing on the Sabbath, especially in Luke, who by tradition was a physician.

In today's Gospel story, the leader of the synagogue, "indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath", strongly criticizes him. Is he attempting to preserve his standing in his faith community by clinging to the literal meaning of the Sabbath law about no work on the Sabbath? Warning them against Jesus, he stirs up the assembly, and Jesus rebukes him, and thereby teaches him, and us too, the new meaning of that commandment: the meaning which brings us here in our own Sunday observance of Sabbath rest.

In freeing the woman from her affliction, Jesus states that he is freeing her from bodily bondage inflicted by the worst of the evil forces afflicting human beings. Bringing about the welfare of a human being takes precedence over even such religious obligations as keeping the Sabbath. It is as much a commandment as the human obligation of work on the other six days of the week. Just as each of his hearers unties his farm animals on the Sabbath to let them have water, how

much more appropriate is it to free a human being from powers working against health, freedom and well-being? Who wouldn't agree with that? Showing compassion and working for the dignity of every human being reflect our Baptismal vows, not just for Sundays but for every other day of the week. Jesus has indeed set us free from a legalistic Sabbath observance, but what has he set us free for?

Apparently the people of God have long struggled with this question. Our reading from Isaiah 2800 years ago puts it this way: "If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, . . . If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth." It's no accident that the prophet connects their faulty observance of Sabbath with issues of justice, such as feeding the hungry and meeting the needs of the afflicted. Sabbath, it seems, is also for us a justice issue. If we ignore God's purposes for Sabbath, just as we so often ignore human needs in our society; if we ignore all those whose struggle for survival depends more and more on their working every day of the week to provide for themselves and their families, all will not be right in our world, or us with God.

Sabbath sets us free to remember our dependency on God. Sabbath reminds us that God is God and we can stop trying to be God. We can rest in our worship of the one God, and learn about the only God who matters, who is living and active in our world. And then we can learn what Jesus would do. It's often not what we expect. Amen.