

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 21, 2022

Luke 13:10-17

10 Now he 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.

Did Jesus break the law?

Easy answer: No.

No way. He couldn't have. He's Jesus. He's sinless. We all know that. So there's no way. End of story.

Matthew's Gospel quotes Jesus as saying "until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."

We might assume Luke would agree. But let's not assume for that makes a ... donkey out of "u" and "me."

If we step out for a moment of our assumptions and preconceived notions, a prosecutor in this case against Jesus might actually salivate at what they have been handed. A public confession with a whole lot of witnesses.

And I don't know as much about how the first-century religious courts of Roman Judea functioned but I do recall a more modern usage of essentially the same defense Jesus uses here: Everybody else is doing it! And what I have done is good and you all can see that!

As a newspaper reporter in the Gold Country of the Sierra Nevada foothills in California a little more than a decade ago, I spent years following the saga of the Trinitas golf course. Beautiful piece of property and written up as such in golf magazines with a national audience.

But the trouble was the whole thing was built without permits. The owners argued it was agritourism and therefore

they could do as they pleased because a token strand of olive trees stood on the property. The county let a winery have a concert venue under that designation, so why can't our olive farm have a golf course? The whole matter divided the community as town halls and public hearings brought out business leaders and interest groups in support and neighboring ranchers and environmentalists against. Each time some aspect of the project came up before the Board of Supervisors, akin to Washington's Boards of Commissioners, it ended up in hours of testimony before a 3-2 vote against legalizing the use of the golf course. Its owners went bankrupt and the next phase of the whole thing sent me on 5-hour round trips to Fresno to sit in federal bankruptcy court proceedings. Riveting stuff.

The way the law seems to work doesn't seem to favor Jesus. But the outcome of his healing work on that sabbath day fared much better in the court of public opinion. It was

good, without any qualifiers. A woman disabled for close to two decades didn't ask to be cured, didn't have her faith questioned to receive care and celebrated it with joy and thanksgiving. The golf course I mentioned didn't have that going for it. Neighbors pointed to overdrawn water tables and negative impacts on their quality of life from an influx of visitors.

The only person we hear from who has any issue with Jesus' healing of this woman is the rules guy. There are rules here, darn it. This is how we keep order. And he expressly points out it's not the healing itself that's problematic. It's the timing of it.

And you know, he has a point. If someone has been disabled for 18 years, what's one more day? Or one less? And it's not that he is just being a stick in the mud. The Jewish people were operating under the expectation that strict adherence to the Law, which had been so hard to

sustain in many times past, could help bring about the coming of the Messiah and an end to oppressive rule from the latest conquering Empire.

Jesus could have healed this woman the day before or the day after, yes. And that would have been great but it would not have stirred up the trouble that it did. And Jesus is a pot-stirrer. He just is. That's what God called him to do and God bless him for it.

Jesus was there to make a point, perhaps more so than he was to make life better for a woman whose name we will never know. And his point and purpose and cause and drive were a challenge. A challenge to the status quo. A challenge to a whole way of thinking. A challenge to faith as a burden to be carried, a set of rules or laws to be followed, boxes to check, lists to cross off.

Jesus came to set people free. Free from the worry about am I enough? Have I done enough? Am I good enough? Do I look good enough? Have I produced enough?

Enough with that, the Lord demands. You are set free from all these ailments. That weigh you down and make you ill physically, mentally and spiritually. And the time for that is now. We cannot change the past. But we no longer have to wait. Jesus is coming ... and we are blessed.

Did Jesus break the law? I don't think so. And I don't think so, in no small part because I can't really set some of those assumptions I have and traditions I cherish aside. But I think he sure as heck bent it.

And that's good. The Law *needs to be bent*, examined and re-examined, studied, critiqued, contextualized, respected, understood and ultimately applied justly. Bent to be seen in the light of the Gospel, the Good News, the

coming of Jesus to be the lens through which it must always be viewed.

We can't only ask what is the Law? But why? How did it come about? Who is this meant for? How do we ensure it gives life and doesn't take it away?

Take the Law of Sabbath. We need rest. God took a rest. We aren't meant to work harder and longer than God, nor even to try. But is it rest if it's spent worrying about every last caveat of a certain set of interpretation of it between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 11:59:59 p.m.? It wouldn't be for me. It is a Law meant to bring abundance to life. It comes only after God has done their work and said, Yes. This is good.

We live in a fallen world that is no longer, without qualification, good. If someone can be healed, if someone can be welcomed, if someone can be set free, regardless of

what day it is, you or I might not even need be the one to do it but at least, for God's sake, let it happen.

And when the work is done – the race completed a marathon and not a sprint – then and only then can creation again be fully and unquestionably good.

Until then, people of God, rejoice at the little things, the little wins that give cause for celebration along the way, the beginnings of longer paths to freedom, the removal of one obstacle before the next can be reckoned with.

Wonder at it all.

And let God's good will be done.

Amen.