

¹⁰Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And 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. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But 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." ¹⁵But 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? ¹⁶And 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?" ¹⁷When 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.

Luke 13:10-17

Message from Sunday, August 21st, 2022 (gospel text above)

In my former career in the golf business, one of my responsibilities was conducting professional golf events at a very high level. These events typically involved a fair amount of money, so we had to make sure we ran the events properly, because people's livelihoods and incomes depended on it. We had to make sure that the Rules of Golf were applied equally to all contestants., and that everyone in these events played "by the same rules" so to speak.

It used to be, when I was active in the business, that there were 41 Rules of Golf involving things like how many clubs you were entitled to have, defining the boundaries and hazards of the golf course etc. Then and now, the rulebook was a small booklet which you carry could easily carry in your pocket. But there were at the time, two other large volumes called the Decisions on the Rules of Golf. These decisions were needed to make interpretations when the Rules of Golf themselves weren't particularly clear on a certain situation and when there was no clear way as to how to render a decision. And so, over the years, as situations not found in the Rules of Golf itself, the number of these "decisions" grew, to address the many gray areas in such rules.

For example, a lost ball. The definition of a lost ball in the course of play required that the contestant be able to identify his or her ball, and if the player was unable to do so, the ball was deemed to be lost. And so they were penalties and procedures to follow requiring the player to replay the shot with a penalty stroke added. That was the rule.

It happens sometimes and still does, that someone for example would hit a ball that pitched up into a tree. Upon arriving near the area where the ball likely was to have been, the player may have looked up into a tree and seen a golf ball lodged in a branch. It more than likely was his or

her ball, but if the player was unable to identify the particular ball as his or hers, it would be considered lost., Because the player could not identify it.

Sometimes the rules as they're written in society, don't settle all disputes or cover all contingencies, when gray areas arise. Rules, laws, are good. They're good for sports, they're good for society as a whole, because they're meant to define the parameters of things. Things like speed limits, laws defining murder, paying our taxes, and the like. Laws keep us safe. Laws keep us from harming one another. Laws keep order in the world. Laws make us treat everyone fairly under the law, or at least they're supposed to. Break the law, and there are consequences and penalties. Period!

With that in mind, I completely emphasize with a rabbi in our gospel text today. He was a student of the Law of Moses; he was raised under the law himself as a good deal. In his little parish he was the interpreter of the Mosaic law for his community. When something or someone in the community was in question, and the Mosaic law didn't cover it – when there were gray areas, he passed it up the chain of command to those whose job it was to interpret the Law. And when a verdict was rendered, some liked the decision, and others did not. The New Testament is full of cases where temple leadership and others question Jesus in certain areas of the Law to try to trick him into rendering a decision that may have favored one person over another.

But the truth is, the Law kept good order in the parish, and more broadly, the Law of Moses had given Israel its identity for generations. In the desert, the Law of Moses kept order in a tough period for Israel. Later, the Law became Israel's identity – it set Israel apart from the rest of the world as God's chosen people.

So I understand the rabbi's concern about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. You just don't heal on the Sabbath. Period. End of discussion. He's being faithful to his call as a good rabbi. He cares deeply about upholding the Law. He had taught his people well. Everyone knew the Law, and you just don't heal on the Sabbath. Sabbath is and was a day of rest. End of discussion. No gray areas. And if you start making exceptions for one person, or one situation, where does it all end? What or who will be the next exception?

We all get the dilemma the rabbi was in, and can completely understand the situation. But here is Jesus, in the synagogue, healing on the Sabbath, a woman who obviously was in great distress, and had been for many years. Why hadn't someone done something for her in all this time? Wouldn't it have made sense that her healing outweighs any legal precedent or law, regardless of the day of the week? What if Jesus hadn't been in the synagogue on this particular day? Would the woman have gone the rest of her life with her ailment? Didn't anyone care? Was the Law here, with no healing on the Sabbath, more important than the well-being of this woman? These questions and more we ask ourselves today?

And so here is Jesus, preaching in the temple on this particular Sabbath. He sees this woman. And he stops his preaching, and calls her forward, and says, “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.” Then he puts his hands on her and immediately she is released from her infirmity, the text says. Now Luke records that Jesus’ opponents in the temple were humiliated. I might add angered, ticked off, and you can add your own adjective here.

But...but, everyone else in attendance was delighted the text says. Finally, someone showed compassion towards this woman! I also get why the rabbi and the leadership were indignant. Jesus had punctured a hole in the Law of Moses through an exception based on grace. And everyone loved it, except the rabbi.

I respect this rabbi. He was faithful to the Law of Moses. He was faithful to the traditions of his faith. He loved his people. But what I think the rabbi misses here, according to Luke's account, is the heart of the Sabbath itself. This faithful rabbi is correct and his interpretation of the law, but I think the example here shows what happens when we put protocol, church doctrine, rules and regulations, above our humanity, and compassion, and love. When we put our rules and regulations, our church doctrine, above the law of love, we lose our humanity in some way.

Although I know we do this at times ourselves, I pray that this church, and the wider church, will never put church doctrine, or rules and regulations, and or theology, above loving God and neighbor,.

I pray that this church, that any church, will air on the side of compassion, grace, and love, over right doctrine every time. I pray that we will look past the things that divide us, and see in all of us, the love of God, regardless of affliction, gender, race, ethnicity, wealth or poverty, or who we choose to love.

Jesus says in the gospels that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The world is full of people like this woman in our gospel story today. Broken by physical infirmities, poverty, race, hatred, bigotry, and more. Bent over double by a world that is so harsh and judgmental toward those on the “outside”. I believe that's what's important in this church and in the world. And that is that God’s love knows no boundaries, no borders, no distinctions, just as God has shown his love for us. And that the love of God in Christ Jesus is bigger than any law or rule we can impose on someone else. That Christ welcome sinner, the broken down, the one who in the world has cast out. Or put down.

And that nothing, nothing in all creation, no church doctrine, no rule or regulation, no matter how well intended, no church, no priest, no rabbi, no pastor, no Imam, no one can or ever will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God amen.