

The Presbyterian Church in Canada
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

February 9th, 2020

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Clerk of Session: Mary Strong

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WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Prelude

*Entry of the Word

Welcome and Announcements

Introit *"Christ, whose glory fills the skies"*

Call to Worship

*Hymn *"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"* #321

Prayer of Approach and Lord's Prayer

Assurance of Pardon

Minister: The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

*Sharing the Peace of Christ *May the God of hope*

*Hymn *"Precious Lord, take my hand"* #675

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

Children's Message

Prayer of Illumination

Responsive Psalm #103:1-5, 13-22

Old Testament Lesson:

Jeremiah 18:1-4.....Page 720

Large Print Bible.....Page 1210

New Testament Lesson:

Luke 10:13-22.....Page 76

Large Print Bible.....Page 1631-2

Reader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks be to God

Anthem *"All praise to thee"*

Message *"Scenic Route"*

WE RESPOND TO GOD

*Hymn *"Christ, you call us all to service"* #585

The Offering

*Doxology *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow"* #830

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

WE ARE SENT OUT AS GOD'S PEOPLE

*Hymn *"God of grace and God of glory"* #490

*Charge and Benediction

*Blessing *"Sing amen"* #264

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, amen, amen, amen,

Amen, we praise your name, O God.

*The Word Goes with Us

Postlude

February 9th 2020 – St Andrew's [Travel Light/Scenic Route]

She had gotten used to looking at people out of the corner of her eye, by looking up and sideways.
 After eighteen years, she could hardly remember
 any other way of seeing the world.
 On this particular Sabbath,
 there was a special excitement at the synagogue,
 where she regularly went to worship.
 A Galilean preacher and prophet,
 Jesus of Nazareth,
 had arrived in town and would be teaching there.
 She and the others in town had heard reports about Jesus—
 how he talked about God's reign arriving soon
 and how he healed sick people.
 She was not sure how many of the rumors to believe,
 so she was trying not to get her hopes up.
 Her life already had too many disappointments to count.
 When she entered the synagogue,
 the place was abuzz.
 As Jesus began to teach, however, the room hushed.
 Moments later, his words turned from teaching to invitation.
 He had caught her eye—
 no mean feat, given that he had to lean over
 and incline his head to do so.
 "Come here," he said to her.

She slowly made her way to the front of the assembly.
 What happened next amazed the whole congregation.
 "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."
 When this man, Jesus, spoke those words
 and put his hands on her broken, bent body,
 she felt power surge through her.
 Without hesitation,
 she straightened her once crooked back.

She stood tall and praised her God.ⁱ

At this point in our journey with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem,
 at some point in every Christ-followers life,
 we may find ourselves wondering...
 ...why'd we even take this trip?
 Being a follower of Jesus has never been
 the easy, sensible path.

In our reading of Scripture and in our lives,
 we are confronted with challenging situations,
 answers to questions that make us uncomfortable

– remember that poor young theologian,
 asking how to get eternal life? –
 we are confronted by people
 who don't understand
 what Jesus is really about;
 Even Christ's own refusal to let us ignore the ugly, hard things in life,
 the potholes in one another's roads.

Jesus himself encountered considerable resistance, rejection,
 anger and eventually, much worse.
 And he never promised that our lives would be easy
 if we committed to a life of following him.
 So why'd we take this trip?
 Why follow Jesus at all?

When Doug read our Gospel text for us this morning,
 the recounting of Jesus in the synagogue,
 what bit stuck your mind?
 What element of the story drew your attention?
 I'm guessing that for many of us,
 it was the synagogue leader
 getting angry with Jesus
 for doing work on the Sabbath.

That was the part that I got caught up on in my first read-through.
 And I think that, these days, that's not altogether unexpected for us.
 After the hard lessons from our message last week,
 living in the dangerous and uncertain world we do
 ...conflict, resistance, controversy...
 we are tuned into those emotions.
 As Christians, as a culture,
 as human beings in the 21st century...
 ...it's like we're constantly braced for impact.

But the real focus of the story gets pointed out to us
 when Jesus makes a clear connection
 between healing this woman and the kingdom images that follow:
 "Jesus said therefore,
 what is the kingdom of God like?
 It's like a mustard seed that grew
 to an immense and welcoming tree;
 it's like a little yeast mixed in
 with three measures of flour,
 but still capable
 of raising the dough."

It's amazing what a simple adverb – a therefore – can do!
 It means we can't read one part without the other;

we have to connect the dots.
 Conflict, resistance, controversy, getting angry...
 ...none of those things are part
 of the kingdom life of God.
 And Jesus is telling us to look
 at what just happened
 with a view of that
 kingdom life in mind.

So if the synagogue leader's anger is not the point...
 ...what's left is the healing of the woman and the Sabbath.

This woman is clearly an important, care-for member of her faith community.
 We know that because,
 mobility issues notwithstanding,
 her community has made sure that she is there
 in the synagogue on that Sabbath day.
 Someone gave her a ride to church.
 And when she was healed by Jesus,
 notwithstanding the anger of the synagogue leader,
 everyone joined her in glorifying God,
 in rejoicing at what Jesus had done.

But what actually happens to her?
 We think of her as being "healed,"
 cured of a painful, debilitating condition,
 and that's how the synagogue leader refers to it, too.
 But not Jesus;
 Jesus says he is setting her free.

And that's a word we normally associate with what Jesus does when he saves us;
 the action of freeing us from our old selves
 and making us new again.
 So perhaps what has happened to this woman
 is better described as a release,
 a restoration of the life she,
 as a daughter of Abraham
 – one of God's own –
 should always have had.

In the kingdom of God, we know, all things are made new and made right.
 What's been broken and damaged will be
 renewed, restored, recreated,
 and the relationships between God and us
 and between each other
 will all be reconciled,
 or made right and whole again.

This woman represents and will now live some of that restored-kingdom life.
 Like a seed or a packet of yeast...
 ...the kingdom starts small,
 but it has a big effect.

It's easy to get indignant or frustrated with the synagogue leader
 who tries to shut Jesus down,
 but he's not doing anything all that untoward.
 It's an attempt at a faithful way
 of applying the Old Testament Jewish law,
 one we Christians long upheld ourselves.

Not so very long ago, Christians with political clout
 made sure that businesses and shops were closed on Sundays;
 the Sabbath as a day of rest is ingrained into
 our post-Christian culture.

And Jesus doesn't tell him he's wrong...
 ...only that he needs to understand what he's seeing Jesus do.
 Jesus uses a form of debating that argues
 from least to greatest,
 applying the same principle at different scales.
 And so Jesus argues from the basis of
 necessary work that is allowed on Sabbath
 – like watering an animal –
 to the greater work,
 that is nonetheless
 still necessary,
 of liberating
 – freeing – this woman.
 And his opponents gave up and the rejoicing began.

But...what really is the Sabbath?
 By connecting the dots between
 freeing the woman from her physical condition
 to working on Sabbath
 to the kingdom,
 Jesus may be trying to use this teachable moment
 with the synagogue leader
 to make a larger point.

So what is the Sabbath?
 Is it just Sunday, the day we go to church?
 Is it a day of rest, of the absence of work and business?
 Why is the Sabbath important?
 Because a day to rest helps us work better

the other six days of the week?
 We need relaxation
 because we cannot
 work continuously?

Is it a day off? Or is Sabbath something more?

The origins of the Sabbath are found in the very first story in our Bibles,
 God's creating of all reality.
 The last thing God did,
 after all else was made and made good,
 was to create one final thing:
 a day of rest, certainly,
 a day God made holy;
 marking the completion of creation,
 celebrating the arrival
 at the end result
 of his creating work.

On this day of holiness and completion,
 a day made so full by God,
 it seems wrong somehow to define it
 by the absence of something.
 Sabbath is far more important than just stopping
 all but the necessary work.

Sabbath is a celebration of God's work completed,
 a holy day, the first day when all creation was complete and good,
 in oneness and right relationship with God.
 Sabbath is a day to rest...
 ...but rest in the presence of God.
 To step into holiness,
 to tend to our relationship with God.
 Sabbath is not a break from "real" life...it's the high point, the peak of life.
 It's like driving in the mountains and taking a sharp turn on the road
 and suddenly seeing a whole gorgeous scenic vista
 open up in front of you,
 or weaving your way through city streets
 until you get to the beach
 and the lake is blue and endless
 all the way to the horizon.
 The Sabbath is so much more than a day off work.

So when Jesus argues that freeing the woman,
 restoring her to wholeness,
 is a perfectly appropriate thing for him to do on the Sabbath,

and then speaks of the kingdom of God
and how it grows...what is he saying?

We believe – we know – that the kingdom of God
is already here and at work in our world in small ways,
and has been since Christ first rose to new life
after his death on the Cross.

We also believe that the kingdom of God will,
at the very end of all things,
be somehow fully and finally here,
will constitute the new reality
in which creation will exist,
made new, restored,
and whole.

Jesus is connecting the kingdom of God with the Sabbath,
a holy day established by God at the very beginning of all things.
All creation and all reality, all time, from start to finish,
big cosmic things...
...and in the middle of all this,
a single woman with a broken body
freed from that brokenness
and restored to wholeness.

A microcosm of the journey of all creation and all humanity,
in one hurting body made free.

She has moved from brokenness to wholeness,
to restored health...
...but more than that, too,
because her life
and the lives of those who were at the synagogue
that day are now infused with hope
and filled with rejoicing in wonder,
with seeds of the kingdom of God
planted within them.

Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel,
who has written a truly extraordinary book about the Sabbath says that:
“six days a week we wrestle with the world...
...on the Sabbath, we care for the seed of eternity
planted in the soul.”ⁱⁱ

Sabbath, then, is a peek into the kingdom of God;
a holy day of cultivating our own kingdom-mustard seeds.
We don’t know when the kingdom of God will fully come,
nor do we know its exact shape

or what an average day in the kingdom will be like.
But we know enough.

The woman who spent so many years bowed down and in pain,
healed – saved –
made free and restored and new...
...that gives us a glimpse of what Jesus' journey was all about;
it's a glimpse of all creation's
– and our own –
journey's end.
And that's a trip worth taking.
Amen.

ⁱ Dramatic re-telling of the "Woman with a Disabling Spirit" by Jeannine K. Brown

ⁱⁱ Abraham Heschel's *Sabbath*, pp.13.