

**Sermon: 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost C Aug. 24, 2025**

**Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher**

**Texts: Isaiah 58:9b-14, Luke 10:10-17**

Today's gospel makes me think of that song Dinah Washington sang so well: *"What a difference a day makes, twenty-four little hours."* Maybe that's all the leader of the synagogue was trying to say when, indignant over Jesus healing on the Sabbath, he reminded everyone within earshot: "There are **six** days on which you can come to be healed, but the **Sabbath** isn't **one** of them." From his point of view, a view with plenty of precedent, **which** twenty-four hours you pick determines whether a healing is something to rejoice about or frown upon, something to praise or to reprimand.

"What a difference a day makes!" could **also** be the refrain of the woman bound and bent over for eighteen years by some infirmity of the spine brought on by a spirit dedicated to suffering, not *shalom*. We aren't told whether she'd come to the synagogue every day for all those years, and, if she had, whether she'd been welcomed or prayed for. But when she appeared that **particular** day, her health, her life, and her connection to community were wonderfully restored. For Jesus **also** appeared that day and saw her and healed her.

"What a difference a day makes!" Some days Jesus' teaching fell on hearts hoping to be watered by hope, on minds eager to be nourished with truth. And on others, the very same message...the very **same Jesus**, met resistance, met hearts of stone and minds shut tight...even against God.

On the day Luke writes about, it seems to have gone **both** ways. Now it may strike **us** as extremely gutsy for Jesus and the synagogue leader to face off in public, but at the time it wasn't all that uncommon for the interpretation of scripture to be argued loud and long in public...usually by rabbis. The **difference** was that Jesus took it out of

the realm of simple argument and placed it squarely in the service of human life. A woman's health and standing in the community were at stake; a daughter of Sarah and Abraham was crippled and bound by the power of evil. And God – the same God who gave the Sabbath – was determined to set her free without delay.

At first glance, this seems to be a story about healing, but it's **also** a story about **authority**. It shows Jesus exercising authority over everything that stands in the way of God's good will for the world. It shows that even **God** is willing to break the Sabbath in order to free God's people to **keep** Sabbath, a Sabbath of liberating joy.

Just **prior** to this story, Jesus announced that his coming would bring a division of the house. And in today's story we see it happen right before our eyes: the leader of the synagogue and his allies on one side and Jesus, the formerly bent-over woman, and the crowd on the other. The lines are drawn and the powers of evil are put on notice for the final battle still to come – a battle to be waged at a most **unlikely** place: at the cross.

But it's not that Jesus draw a line and shuts out his opponents. It's that his **opponents** draw a line and paint themselves into a corner. And **in** that corner they suddenly find themselves face to face **not** with the God in whose name they sought to preserve a pure and unforgiving Sabbath, but with the powers of evil, with everything that binds instead of frees, that crushes instead of heals. In the presence of the Living Word of God -- Jesus, the leader of the synagogue and his allies stand on principle and refuse to embrace the freedom Jesus brings. In so doing, they condemn themselves to a narrow, joyless life where propriety takes the place of praise, where being right becomes the narrow definition of righteousness, where even God and God's own mighty deeds are bound and restricted to an "appropriate" time and place. They seem to have forgotten the words of Isaiah we heard earlier, words that define the Sabbath and righteous life not as empty

rituals but as lives lived “removing the yoke” that binds the sick and the poor, the hungry and the oppressed.

The gospels are **full** of stories of **Jesus** unbinding people – Lazarus from his grave, the Gadarene demoniac from the cemetery of madness, Zaccheus from an addiction to greed, lepers from decay and isolation, and today, the bent-over woman from a life of crippling pain and a lifetime of being bent so low, people never even saw her. Time and time again, the gospels show us that Jesus, God’s living, liberating Word, will not rest until **every** daughter and son stands free.

You and I also are living testimonies to God’s steadfast purpose and Jesus’ liberating deeds. We, **too**, are God’s daughters and sons freed from the power of everything that would keep us bound and bent, crippled and diminished. Each of us has found ourselves in the path of the Christ who desires our wholeness in body, mind, and spirit. For the One who came from the right hand of God and was worthy of worship and praise **himself** willingly bent over in service to us and was broken on the cross, so we might stand before God as healed and upright, whole and holy people. Baptism **unites** us with these saving deeds and puts us under God’s protection.

But baptism **also** calls us to take up Jesus’ ministry, a ministry of healing and controversy. Because, even now, in the Church, in this city and nation and world, there are women and men, boys and girls bent-over and crippled --by illness, certainly, but **also** by racism, prejudice, violence, and greed – people who need to hear God’s liberating Word. God is calling **us** to do as **Jesus** did, to interrupt the unquestioned policies and routines of systems and institutions that have forgotten their mandate to provide healing, promote freedom, and promote the common good, that use biblical language and religious tradition to **resist** that call to health and dignity and justice. God is calling **us** to call **them** to their true purpose...and to do it right **now**.

And, because God took no sabbath from saving **us**, we are now called to adopt God's own urgency, to take no sabbath from the Church's mandate to unbind and set free, to tell the world "what a difference a day makes," the day of Calvary and the day of resurrection, a difference that spells healing and health for the world.

We **all** have a place in this work of healing and liberation. At Confirmation and every time we affirm our baptismal promises, we promise "to proclaim the good news of Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth." For it is the very **nature of the Gospel** to not accept things as they are, but rather to call them to their true destiny and purpose. Jesus' ministry provided a foretaste of the coming kingdom in which the world will be full mended, in which there will be no blindness or loss of healing, no one crippled or disfigured by disease or by evil, in which there will be no conflicts between what is good for one and what is good for all. In the meantime, baptized into Jesus' own mission, we are called to find ways to manifest that future **right here and right now**.

This is no easy vocation; this asks us not simply to advocate for programs and policies and services and funds. This requires **us** to change our **own** point of view, to bend down to see those who have been forgotten, to kneel down and look into the eyes of brothers and sisters too long invisible to their community. Yet we are not without power or help. Today again God provides us a meal of power, Christ's own body and blood under bread and wine. In bread broken we find courage to be a church broken for the life of the world. In wine poured out, we receive strength to be a church that bends down, bends over, and spends itself in love and service to a world crippled by death in every guise. So let us eat and drink gladly, let us look and see as Jesus did that day in the synagogue, then let us go forth boldly, singing to brothers and sisters who long to hear a liberating word: rejoice and be glad, for God's new and joyful Sabbath is dawning in the world. Amen.