

Let us pray: Loving Father, You know all things and You knew, so long ago, that we would need a Sabbath day. Grant us wisdom so that we can understand what You have for us in this message. Open our minds and hearts, O Gracious Lord. Amen!

Several weeks back, I was at a function and spoke with several folks that knew I was a Lay Preacher. Two of them, separately, asked how I started my sermons, to which I replied, "it depends on the text." Both, then told me that I needed to start with a story; one of them told me, that I need several stories. That is my story, though it has nothing to do with today's text.

I have been a Certified Lay Preacher for a little over three years, and especially in the last six months, I have been looking at the various texts differently. The reason being, we hear these texts, these lessons, every three years, based on the Common Lectionary, the system used to determine the readings each week. But even though the texts have not changed, I have. I am reading and studying the weekly texts, looking at them with a different frame of mind. I am looking for what God has for me

to share with the various congregations that I serve, and what He has for me.

An additional reason for the intense study is that I am in training to become a Synodically Authorized Minister, known as a SAM. When I complete my training, I may be assigned to a smaller congregation that needs a minister, a worship leader, someone who is able to help with a congregation with pastoral care. Partially because of this training, I felt today's sermon needed the title of "*Sabbath – Law versus Gospel.*"

Like some of you, I remember the days when almost everything was closed on Sundays, the "Blue Laws" were in effect. There was no shopping of any kind, as far as I can remember. Then it came to the point of stores being closed between 10:30am and 1pm; finally, that law was repealed. Now, you can purchase about anything, any day of the week. Ultimately, that means, life never seems to slow down, there is never, ever, any rest.

Our text today, opens with Jesus teaching in a synagogue, on a sabbath. Nothing unusual with that, it was a normal thing

for Jesus to do. The unusual thing was a woman appeared, who had been crippled by a spirit for over eighteen years. Bent over, unable to stand up straight; can you imagine (bend over for example)? Jesus called her over, set her free from her ailment. He laid his hands on her, she was immediately healed. She stood up straight and began praising God.

Now I realize that some might feel envious of the woman that had been cured, however, I would like to think that we, Sisters, and Brothers in Christ, would be praising God with her; years of pain, gone by a word and a touch. Praising God, for one less person to be in pain.

There is no real difference for us today, is there? We hear of people being cured of various diseases. Hopefully, we rejoice with them. Since, we will never know whose life that person might help, in the future, we keep on rejoicing. To me, this is an example of Gospel, the Good News of Christ love, given freely.

Did you notice, that the woman who was cured, never asked for Jesus' help? That she did not do anything that would get her noticed, other than the fact that she was there. And since

she was a woman, the fact that Jesus did notice her was significant, for Jesus cured her out of His love for her, out of love for others.

However, this was not what the leader of the synagogue felt, no, he focused on the fact that the woman was cured on the sabbath. The text says that he was indignant, and 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." Nothing directly to Jesus, nor nothing about the miracle that happened. This leader was only concerned about two things, the law, and his control over the people; for him, it seems, it was never about the people, themselves.

Jesus' response was one that we might expect from Him, He pointed to the religious leaders of the day's interpretation of the law. Jesus reminded the leader that the animals were untie, which would have been classified as work, the animals were lead to water, work, and the owner might have had to draw the water, which would have, also been, work. Jesus continued with, "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?" Jesus pointed to Gospel, to love.

One of the commentaries that I listen to in preparation for this sermon made the point of referring to Moses' explanation of the Third Commandment. In Exodus 20:8-11, God gave the commandment to Moses this way, "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son, or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it."

In contrast, Moses, in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, said a couple of things differently. First, Moses reminded the people that the Lord, their God had commanded them to remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Moses did not include the part about the Lord creating everything in six days and resting on the seventh, blessing it and consecrating it. Instead, Moses said, in the

fifteenth verse, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

I am not sure why the difference between the Exodus text and the Deuteronomy text. Nevertheless, it is important to remember from today's text that Jesus said the woman was untied, that she was bound by Satan and that she had been set free from bondage. All words that would help someone to think about the freedom from being a slave of the Egyptians. For us today, maybe our thoughts would be about how we have a freedom in Christ, how Satan no longer binds us, how we are free from the bondage of sin.

The last part of today's text speaks of all of Jesus' opponents being put to shame and how the entire crowd rejoiced at all the wonderful things that He was doing. Our text does not say this but is this not another example of Jesus doing for the people, no matter what the outcome to Himself, and by doing so, making the religious leader hate Him that much more?

Back to the title of today's sermon, "*Sabbath – Law versus Gospel.*" As part of my SAM training, we have studied Luther's Small Catechism. In reference to the Third Commandment, which Luther noted only as "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy", he asks his standard question of, "what does this mean?" and has this explanation, "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching of God's Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it."

It seems to me that Luther understood that the faith tradition he was hoping to change was very demanding of the people, so it might have been that the people felt that going to work was better than going to church. I believe Luther was hoping for a change, a change that by keeping God's Word holy as well as people learning from it, that their lives would be better, that they would grow closer to God. I know for myself, learning more about God's Word, has helped me to grow closer to Him.

Yet, as I mentioned in my initial prayer, God knew His people would need rest, especially a Sabbath rest. God knew that people would get busy; and do we not see that busyness in our lives today, not only people around us but ourselves as well? Many are so busy, that they do not know how to rest. Or they are too tired to rest, to relax, or to find time so that they might be able to rest in the Lord.

As part of a different study that I have done, I read a book called, *"Sabbath – Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight In Our Busy Lives."* Wayne Muller wrote the book. In the chapter called, *"Rest for the Weary,"* Muller writes, and I quote "And so we are given a commandment: Remember the Sabbath. Rest is an essential enzyme of life, as necessary as air. Without rest, we cannot sustain the energy needed to have life. We refuse to rest at our peril – and yet in a world where overwork is seen as a professional virtue, many of us feel we can legitimately be stopped only by physical illness or collapse." End quote.

Yes, many of us are busy, but when busyness stops us from "living life," if you will, we are hurting ourselves and possible,



hurting others. I have an acrostic for the word BUSY – Being Under Satan's Yoke! I do not want to be busy, do you?

God gave us this gift of Sabbath. How can we refuse such a generous gift. It is a gift that is Law and a gift that is Gospel, a gift of love. Should we not follow His command to take a weekly day of rest and spend time with God, for He continues to reach out to us, to be in a relationship with us, and to always, always love us!

Let us pray, Father, thank You for Your love, for Your desire for us to have a Sabbath rest. Lead us to that place of rest. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!