

Your Day of Rest is God's Day to Work

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Lord, cause us never to despise preaching, and Your Word, but to regard it as sacred, and gladly hear and learn of the forgiveness of all of our sins, which Jesus gave Himself in death to earn for us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we celebrated Michaelmas, a day we consider how God uses His angels to guard and protect us from evil and the forces of the devil and his minions.

The weeks after Michaelmas continue with an emphasis on recognizing the spiritual forces against us, all so that we can recognize Christ's power over them.

In that vein, we will hear about a woman who, for 18 years, had suffered the oppression of a disabling spirit, and yet, she is the one most blessed in this text.

Our text for meditation today is...

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.

(ESV)

These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

For 18 years this daughter of Abraham had suffered. Bent over, unable to straighten up.

And yet, much more sad to consider is the spirit of evil that showed itself in the leader of the synagogue.

Consider the cold, callousness of this man.

Here this woman, presumably a member of his synagogue, was relieved from her suffering, and he would chastise her: "Come back any other day to be healed."

!As if this were such a regular, natural occurrence to be healed!

And yet, there she was, for 18 years unhealed. What type of a shepherd was he?

This hireling cared nothing for the sheep.

But really, was his chastisement directed at her?

We have no indication that she sought Jesus out; but the opposite, **When Jesus saw her,**

He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability."

She did nothing. He did everything.

So really, the chastisement was directed at Jesus.

Yet, the leader takes the pot-shot at the easier target and would humiliate the woman,

and anyone else that would seek relief from Jesus.

But Jesus wouldn't hear of it. He defends the woman (and His applied mercy), "**You hypocrites!**" (It is hard to hear Jesus say this in anything but a firm, sharp voice.)

Hypocrisy. That was the sin that Jesus would point out and rebuke Himself.

The leader had chastized, "**There are six days in which work ought to be done.**"

He was quoting from God's explanation of the 3rd Commandment given at Mt. Sinai,

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,

but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Exodus20:9-10

Surely, Scripture was on his side.

But in contrast, there stood the Word-made-flesh, before his eyes,
and He seems to think that this was a mis-application of God's commandment.

In fact, that it was the leader of the synagogue who was working,
when he should have been resting.

To make Jesus' point, first He points out some form of physical labor that all Israelites did,
**Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger
and lead it away to water it?**

To neglect this act of labor would have been a violation of the owner's vocation
to properly care for his animal. Even zealots understood this practical bit of agriculture.

And so Jesus now argues from the lesser, caring for beasts, to the greater, the care of a human,
saying, "**And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham
whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?**"

The real issue for the correct observance of the Sabbath was not labor, but freedom.

This synagogue leader would make the day of rest into a day of labor by making the day
about man's work, or non-work. About man's obedience to God.

But he was missing the point of God's regulation not to work on the Sabbath.

It wasn't just some sign of obedience, it was to give them opportunity to be free
from their physical labors, so that they could be loosed, or freed, spiritually as well.

It was their day of rest, but God's day of work.

Not that God didn't work every day, but here would be their opportunity to reflect on it,
meditate on it, as they set the day aside to hear His Word taught and explained.

Freed from the burden of physical labor,

they could be free from the burden of spiritual labor as well.

Free to simply receive God's grace and mercy, as the woman did in our text.

I wonder if the synagogue leader heard a little bit of Isaiah's rebuke from Isaiah chapter 1:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken:

"Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib,

but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. "Isaiah1:2-3

Here, the dumb beasts know well enough the hand that feeds them,

but Israel was not recognizing that just as the animals rely on one to feed them, so do people.

Yet, we people have a hard time remembering this.

We like to think that our daily bread comes from our work, our labor. But it doesn't.

That was part of the Sabbath day rest, too: trust that God would provide daily bread.
It is true that normally God uses our labors to provide for our physical needs,
but it is all given, whether much or little, by His grace and mercy.

There are some who teach that the Sabbath laws are still in effect for Christians today.
But they mis-apply this Law and mis-interpret St. Paul's clear admonition from Colossians 2:
**Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink,
or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.**
These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ^[16-17]
We are free from those OT ceremonial laws which were fulfilled for us by Christ.

But there are also some who'd put the emphasis and labor back into observing the 3rd Comm.
And those 'some' aren't always, others, but ourselves.
We make it a labor, when we come:
because we are supposed to, or because someone made us.
because we will feel guilty if we don't or others might wonder where you are.
because you want something and you consider this a way to broker a deal with God.
because it is a sign of your obedience, it's your act of worship.
These are just as hypocritical as what the synagogue leader did
and are the bonds that would keep you from true spiritual and eternal freedom.

But there is another and godly reason to gather together around God's Word and Sacraments.
It is the reason of the woman. She came to receive rest.
There she was, presumably as she had come for the last 18 years, to the synagogue
in observance of the Law, not to justify herself, but to be freed by her God.
Bound and oppressed by Satan, she sought God's mercy, no doubt praying for freedom,
and yet for 18 years, God allowed the spirit to oppress her physically.
Still she came, though it would seem that God had not heard her prayers for 18 years.
Still she came to receive what was truly more important, freedom from her sin and guilt,
in the promised work of the Messiah.

And behold, God was there, week after week, freeing her and listening to her,
until 1 Sabbath, the Messiah came. He saw her. He called her. And He healed her.
He laid His hands on her, not afraid of any disabling spirit. Freely. Mercifully. Graciously.
Not afraid to seek her out, despite what the hypocritical leader would think and say.
He came to the synagogue that day to do the work of God, to loose, to set free,
those who were bound. Both the hypocrite, as well as the one who recognized her need.

This is God's work every day of rest.
You come, not so that you can do a work for God,
but so that you can receive God's work for you.
We generally choose to gather on Sundays in remembrance of Jesus' day of resurrection,
the day after He rested in the tomb from all the work of redemption that He had done,
culminating on Good Friday when He shed His blood as the price for our sin and guilt.
In freedom, Christians regularly gather on Sundays, but there is no Law to do this.
We can gather on Mondays, or Tuesdays, or any other day, for Jesus has sanctified them all.

They are all days of rest for the Christian. All days freed from Satan and our sin & guilt.
All days when Jesus would expose your sinful thoughts which would bind you to Satan.
All days when Jesus would mercifully loose those bonds and free you
through the remembrance of your Baptism,
the declaration of the forgiveness of your sins,
and the administration of the Lord's Supper,
whereby He comes to you and touches you and forces Satan and his evil spirits
to flee from you.

Here He answers your prayers and gives you rest. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria