

**SERMON****+ Lectionary 21 C (Pentecost 11)****August 24, 2025**

This poor woman.  
She is bent over so far  
that all she can see is the ground in front of her own feet.  
She probably didn't even see Jesus.  
She was just coming to the synagogue.

And being bent over so far,  
she wasn't easy to be seen either.  
Lost in the crowd.  
But Jesus saw her.

That's one of the details we should notice in this story.  
She doesn't come looking for Jesus.  
She doesn't ask him to heal her.

He sees her,  
calls her over to him,  
and he sets her free  
from the disease that has crippled her all those years.

God acts first. Always.  
It's not anything we have done,  
it's not anything we could do  
that gets us closer to God or to heaven.  
God acts first,  
apart from any merit or status we have.  
God acts by grace to save us.  
Sees us, and sets us free.

God sent Jesus to die on a cross,  
and raised Jesus from death,  
and in baptism united you to that same death and resurrection,  
claimed and called you "beloved child,"  
and saved you.

God did it.  
It's already done.

Jesus' death and resurrection happened  
long before we even were.  
And for most of us,  
baptism happened in the earliest days of our life,  
before we had a chance to do anything, good or bad,  
like Alaya, Bellami, and Bennett.

God saves us by sheer grace –  
saves us, forgives us, redeems us, loves us –  
because God wants to.  
God always acts first.  
By God's power and grace,  
you are set free from the burden,  
the guilt, the fear, the shame, the sin  
that weighs you down and bends you over.

And in the light of the gospel of life, truth, and love,  
you can stand up straight,  
not because you came to Jesus,  
not because you sought him out,  
not because you did anything to deserve it,  
but because he saw you,  
called you to himself,  
touched you with love, truth, life, and grace,  
and gave his life to set you free.  
Just like he did for this woman in the synagogue.

And that's another detail about this that we need to notice.  
Luke tells us, not that Jesus healed the woman,  
but that he set her free.  
That's a key to understanding this argument  
about keeping the sabbath  
between the leader of the synagogue and Jesus.

The synagogue leader,

whose calling, authority, and duty it is to do just this,  
instructs the people and calls Jesus to accountability  
for working on the sabbath.

And he's right.

By the Jewish law, what Jesus did when he laid his hands on the woman  
was work.

And it was the Sabbath.

And the rules are clear.

But Jesus brings another perspective to the argument.  
He doesn't discount or negate  
the whole idea of sabbath.  
He doesn't call the leader wrong,  
but a hypocrite.  
What we have here is an argument  
about the motives and purposes  
for the commandment to keep the sabbath.

There are two accounts of the Ten Commandments.

One is in Exodus, chapter 20;

the other is in Deuteronomy, chapter 5.

And the thing is that these two different accounts  
present different motivations and purposes  
for the commandment to keep the sabbath.

In Exodus, God commands sabbath rest  
because in Genesis, when God created,  
God worked for six days.  
Then God consecrated –  
set apart, blessed, made special –  
a seventh day and rested on it.

So the motivation and purpose of the sabbath  
according to the Exodus commandment  
is to imitate God  
and rest from work on a special day set apart.  
And that's why the synagogue leader's insistence

on keeping the law by resting and doing no work  
is good and right.

We can see how the synagogue leader  
roots his argument in this Exodus perspective:  
he tells the people that there are six days to work  
and Jesus could have done the healing the day before  
or wait until tomorrow – the next work day,  
but this is the sabbath – a holy day set apart for rest,  
according to God's created order.

But Jesus introduces a different idea,  
and it comes from the motivation and purpose of the sabbath  
from the commandments in Deuteronomy.

There God commands the sabbath day of rest  
in order to remember.  
“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,  
and the LORD your God brought you out from there  
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm;  
therefore the LORD your God commanded you  
to keep the sabbath day.” (Deut. 5:15)

See, here the sabbath is commanded  
not for rest according to the order of creation,  
but as a time to remember  
that God has saved his chosen people and set them free.

Jesus argues for the Sabbath's holy work  
of remembering God, salvation, and freedom,  
by setting the woman free to stand up straight.

You can hear Jesus argue that position  
when he declares to the woman,  
“you are set free from your ailment”  
rather than, “you are healed,”  
and when he calls the synagogue leader a hypocrite  
because unbinding livestock for water would be allowed,

but setting free this daughter of Abraham from her bondage is not.

Jesus sees her and sets her free  
in obedience to the commandment  
to keep the sabbath.

God always acts first,  
and sees you,  
and sets you free.

Free from our bondage to sin and self-centeredness,  
free from fear and vengeance,  
free from guilt and shame.

God frees us to stand up straight  
free to love and heal,  
free to forgive and show mercy,  
free to live in unity with him and with one another  
in the ways of God's reign,  
in the Spirit poured out on us in baptism,  
and in the freedom of life in the resurrection  
given to us as a gift  
by the God of power and grace  
who sees us.  
Thanks be to God.