

Restoring the Sabbath January 25, 2026

Luke 6: 1-11; 13: 10-17

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This past Tuesday night after our Threshold Collaboration Steering Committee Meeting, some of us were lamenting the changes we have experienced over the years regarding Sundays not being sacred anymore, with sports, Sunday shopping, and other activities taking place on Sunday. One person even remembered all churches in the town writing the sports organizations asking them not to have any activities until after 12pm but there was no response, no change. Sundays have changed greatly and what we know as the Sabbath or Sunday, is no longer what it was for society. We like to blame this change on our lower attendance and a lack of families at worship. While it is a contributing factor, there are other ones as well, not the least of which is the changing demographics. There are much fewer families in our society than there was in the baby boomer years.

The Pharisees in our readings today were concerned about changing the Sabbath and the way Jesus was pushing the rules. Often in these readings and sermons about these stories, the Pharisees are presented as hard-nosed rule followers, and while there may be some truth to that, and Jesus challenged their tight rules and even their hypocrisy, the Pharisees were actually the more liberal, in first century Judaism, like the liberal, mainline Protestants of our time. While other Jewish sects claimed that people needed the priesthood and the temple to mediate between them and God, the Pharisees were more open to people interacting directly with God. They were trying to preserve the traditions of the Sabbath, which had evolved into what work one was allowed and not allowed to do during the Sabbath. Jesus was pushing those boundaries. He wasn't focused on breaking the rules as much as expanding the understanding of them. He wants people, especially the religious rulers, which would then allow the people, to return to the heart of what the sabbath was always meant to be. In Genesis, it is the climax of creation. God rests, not because God was tired, but because creation was whole, complete. Sabbath is about restoring to wholeness. Sabbath was created for life, freedom and renewal. Jesus' message and understanding is that If healing wasn't allowed on the sabbath, then we are not honouring the Sabbath. God's work of healing and restoration is sabbath work. Working toward healing

and wholeness is restoring creation and is sabbath work. That is Jesus' message in his challenges within these passages.

In one of the stories in Chapter 6, we have a man with a withered hand, and the Pharisees are watching to see if Jesus will heal him on the sabbath. He knows this and before he does, he asks them, is it better to do good or do harm on the sabbath? He looks around at all of them, then asks the man to "stretch out your hand" and as he did so it was healed, restored. Jesus' message is that choosing not to act, when that choice results in harm or danger for another, dishonours God, dishonours the Sabbath.

Healing and work toward wholeness in whatever form is Sabbath work, is God's work. This is the message Jesus is trying to convey here. Emily Colledge with the Christian Reformed Church in her reflections on this passage says Jesus gives this man new life. He can be reunited to a rhythm of life he was not able to before. Jesus is the liberator and healer. She tells a story that she connects with this scripture, and the grace and love experienced in it. Sometimes we need encouragement to know that God is there. If we could just stretch out our hand and know that God is stretching out God's hand to us. Emily was on a trip to the US/Mexico border where the border wall had been built - a looming, ominous structure, spanning miles and miles, about 20 feet tall. She says

"we stopped at a portion of the wall where a prayer shrine had been made on the Mexico side. It was in memory of a young man who was shot and killed trying to climb over the wall. As we listened to our guide tell the story, a car pulled up and a young couple with two children got out of the car to leave flowers at the spot. Our translator started a conversation with them. Our group was on the U.S. side and they were on the Mexico side, separated by the wall.

We learned that this was the family of the young man who was shot and killed. ... At just the time we stopped to pray, this family stopped to pray as well. Our guide asked the family if we could pray together. And then, in a moment I will never forget, they stretched out their hands through the wall. We stretched out our hands and took each other's hands, through the wall, and prayed together.

Don't be afraid to listen, trust, and obey. Stretch out your hand. The Lord of Grace is there to receive you."

This weekend there has been another brutal murder of a person in Minnesota. Nurse Alex Jeffrey Pretti was stretching out his hand to support

a woman who was being attacked on the street by ICE agents. He had a phone in his hand not a gun. The woman was dropping off her child at school. It is dark times when people are attacked and killed for supporting one another. These struggles and challenges can weigh us down. They are heavy burdens that make it hard to stand up straight, to stand up to oppression.

The second passage is largely about the healing of a woman who has been inflicted with a disease for 18 years, that has made her bent over. She could be a symbol of all that burdens us, or how things weigh heavily on us and make it hard to carry on. When she is healed, she is a symbol of liberation and celebration – she stands up straight and praises God. Jesus honours her as a daughter of Abraham, and as such, part of the community that he came to serve. For Jesus, the healing of this woman takes precedence over a religious obligation, even the Sabbath. Jesus reinterprets the Sabbath indeed. It is not a period in the week where ceremonies are more important than those in need of help, especially those viewed as untouchables and those on the margins of society, like this woman crippled by a spirit. He also reinterprets the posture of the synagogue. Of all places, the synagogue should have been a healing and helpful place, not the place where a woman crippled for 18 years is basically told, “Wait longer for your healing.” She had to face their crippling attitudes on top of dealing with her crippling condition. This is exemplified by the fact that it is OK to lead an ox to drink on the sabbath but not heal a crippled woman. An ox is of more value than a women in this religious interpretation. Unfortunately, too often, women regardless of whether they are disabled, are made secondary to the things that allow men in power to take care of what they really value—power, money, and the status quo.

All of these passages are about redefining the sabbath and sabbath work as God’s work. Restoring creation and healing towards wholeness. Sabbath work is precisely work that frees us to finally do the work that we are created to do, that all of creation is created to do: praise God. This woman is able to be unbound from the burden of the evil that binds her so that she is immediately able to do her proper work as a beloved creature of God. She is freed to praise her Creator. Jesus seemingly gives us an example not of sabbath rest but of the sabbath work of re-orienting our work in a way that liberates it. Whether it is work or rest that restores, this is what the sabbath is about.

While our experience of sabbath, of Sundays, has changed, our calling to live out the faith, to follow Jesus, and do God's work has not. As we seek to understand how we be church in this time, may we continue to commit ourselves to God's love and justice, and not be caught into the ways that the challenges might limit us, weigh us down, but see what opportunities it may present us. If God's work is sabbath work, and sabbath work is about restoring creation and healing others toward wholeness, may we embrace this work, this idea of sabbath, regardless of our size, and work together to become sustainable, vital communities of faith. Amen