

Best Sabbath Ever! Luke 13:10-17

In case you haven't heard one of my favorite things to do is to go canoeing at the cottage. Stoney Lake is in the Kawarthas and is a pristine lake for canoeing when the water cooperates.

Last year I began to canoeing with my old pup Sophie. Like Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslett on the Titanic, Sophie would sit in the front guiding us and smelling the sweet sea air. It was the first year she did that.

Well a year later, another year older, she wanted nothing to do with the canoe. She managed to tip the canoe at the dock soaking both of us. I couldn't do anything but laugh and continue on the journey anyway.

I paddled enjoying the nice breeze and calm lake. I had gone quite a ways from our cottage and then I saw it. A white streak from the corner of my eye. Sophie had followed me along the shoreline for about twenty-five cottage properties. What a turkey. What a loyal dog. How she made me feel in that moment. She didn't want me to forget that she loved me. I welcomed her with open arms. Obviously, she ended up in the canoe for a ride home.

Today we hear about how Jesus was teaching in the temple on the Sabbath. Jesus is surrounded by followers and those who were at the cusp of abandoning the law for a new law, a new life found in Jesus. Imagine you have come from a distance bent over hobbling along with some sort of cane in so much pain. (For some of you this might be a reality for you right now) You have been laid up like this for 18 years. As you enter few notice you. Jesus does though. He senses your urgency to be healed. He invites you to join him in the circle and lays hands on you saying, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." You stand up tall and praise God.

Can you imagine something like this happening hear at Zion. A stranger walks in during worship. They are bent over, shoes taped together with duct tape, ripped jeans, maybe a bit smelly, and looking like they haven't had a shower for a long time. They come to the front as I begin to preach they look at me, they look for a blessing. What would your reaction be? I know I would be confused. The best thing to do at that point would be to stop, listen and let the gospel jump off the page.

The chances of someone interrupting worship like this are few and far between but it could happen.

Our community of Pembroke and many others are filled with people bent over from a spirit that is crippling them. Our systems are bent over from attitudes and beliefs that are crippling them. Jesus desires and proclaims healing and restoration for both. That's where we come in.

Regardless of circumstances, we can't postpone people's request for help. Jesus didn't say to the woman come back tomorrow when its not the sabbath. He healed her right away. When the authorities questioned him, Jesus in turn challenged them. "You hypocrites! Does not each of you take care of your ox or donkey making sure they have water on the sabbath?"

Jesus was breaking the law for good reason. The care, concerns and the experience of a loving Messiah were things people needed to see, hear and experience.

Jesus saw the woman and declared transformation, healing and release to her, showing the people and us what adhering to a day of rest means. By the goodness and grace of God, we who are bent over in all kinds of ways are invited to experience this same kind of transformation, healing and release. Through the waters of baptism, we are washed and made clean, and are set free. Through the bread and wine of communion we are fed, nourished and forgiven, and are set free. As we gather with others and invite everybody to experience God's grace and claim all of who they are and hope to be in our midst, we discover the vastness of God's welcome and the fullness of God's rest.

Reflecting on the loyalty of Sophie my dog, who insisted on staying by my side it felt good to feel that much unconditional love.

Whatever it is that's keeping you bent over today, you are seen and loved unconditionally by the One who knows your name and who stays by your side through the darkness of sin and death. You are seen and loved by the one who defeated the power of death so that you might hear the words "beloved, you are set free from your ailment," and so that you can stand up straight and join the crowd in worship and praise.

As we continue to participate in the resurrection life of Christ, may we be a community that seeks healing and wholeness for those who are burdened and bent over. May we reflect on our own systems, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that have become limiting and are in need of transformation. And may we each hear for ourselves the incredible invitation to healing and wholeness. Amen.