

Worship Service “Freedom“

Pentecost 11, Year C, 21st August, 2022

Hebrews 12:18-29 The Message / Luke 13:10-17 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video)

[*Praise Him*](#)

Donnie Harper

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Welcome Guests / Announcements

[*Pass the Peace*](#)

[*Annie Center*](#)

Opening Hymn

Here In This Place

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Call to Worship (responsive)

One: We may be thirsty and parched, like an un-watered garden,
so we come into God’s presence:

All: The Divine One is a spring of water!

One: We may be weary from worry and work so we come into God’s presence:

All: The Holy One offers us Sabbath rest!

One: We may be lost or confused so we come into God’s presence:

All: The Wise One offers us welcome and guidance!

One: We may be bent over with struggle or pain So we come into God’s presence:

All: The Healing One empowers us to stand strong!

Invocation

O God of all goodness, **you welcome us, forgive us and heal us.**

You seek us out from places where we have hidden from you.

You crown us with steadfast love and mercy. Reveal yourself to us in this moment.

Let us know your presence so that we may bless you:

Bless you, O God! Bless your holy name! Amen.

Epistle Reading – Hebrews 12:18-29 The Message

Unlike your ancestors, you didn't come to Mount Sinai—all that volcanic blaze and earthshaking rumble—to hear God speak. The ear splitting words and soul-shaking message terrified them and they begged him to stop. When they heard the words—"If an animal touches the Mountain, it's as good as dead"—they were afraid to move. Even Moses was terrified.

No, that's not *your* experience at all. You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant. The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel's—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace.

So don't turn a deaf ear to these gracious words. If those who ignored earthly warnings didn't get away with it, what will happen to us if we turn our backs on heavenly warnings? His voice that time shook the earth to its foundations; this time—he's told us this quite plainly—he'll also rock the heavens: "One last shaking, from top to bottom, stem to stern." The phrase "one last shaking" means a thorough housecleaning, getting rid of all the historical and religious junk so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered.

Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander. He's actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and he won't quit until it's all cleansed. God himself is Fire!

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, you knew us before we took our first breath. You uttered your living Word and brought forth light, love, and life. You gathered us from the dust of the earth and called us your people. You sent us into the world to proclaim your mighty and wondrous deeds. You are with us even now as we continue our call.

Mighty God, you have done great things; who is like you? You alone are our rock of refuge. You alone are our strong fortress. You alone are our hope and in you alone is our trust.

Merciful God, your love never ends. We confess to you that we do not always share your love as we should. Where you have called us to live as one body, we exist as divided members. Where you have called us to give our Spirit-given gifts, we ignore your call. Where you have called us to forgive, we have forgotten your mercy.

Gracious God, do not be far from us! Strengthen us that we might be givers of your grace and may your steadfast love be known to all of your children. Send your Holy Spirit to empower our hands to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and love all as you have first loved us.

Loving God, hear today the prayers that we lift up to you. Be with those of us who are [*name of community*]. Give us hearts of courage and songs of your grace

Abundant God, be with those of us that yearn for your restoration and healing. Today, we ask your blessing upon [*list names of those in need of healing*]. We who are [*name of community*] also lift up to you those who we bring before you with our lips or within our hearts...

Faithful God, your power and your righteousness reach the heavens. Hear us, your servants, as we follow you to the day when faith, hope, and love will be upon the lips of all of us, your children. These things we pray in the name of your Son, Amen

Hymn

Healer of Our Every Ill

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Gospel Reading

Luke 13:10-17 NRSV

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.'

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, 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.'

But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?

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?'

Exodus 20:8 tells us to, “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 day to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work...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 seventh day and consecrated it.” That is one of the Ten Commandments, the core of the legal and moral code found throughout the Jewish Torah that we call the first five books of the Bible. I'd like to start out this morning with us reflecting on what that term means to us now, as Christians in the 21st century.

What does Sabbath mean to you? For many, we equate sabbath to Sunday, a day to go to church to worship in the morning, and then go about our day engaged in leisure activities or visiting with family and friends. For others, Sunday is a day for brunch and socializing, a day to sleep in and read the Sunday paper or a good novel. For some, it's just another day of the week. For me as a pastor, it has a dual meaning. The Sabbath, or Sunday, is the big day of my work week, a time to lead the flock in worship and praise, preaching and teaching. On the other hand, my personal sabbath is another day, often Monday, a day off from my duties as a minister, for rest and restoration.

Sabbath can have different meanings based on the context. In the Christian world, it's generally been narrowed down to a few hours on Sunday morning, and sometimes a few hours on Sunday evening as well. In times past, everything would be closed on Sundays due to the “blue laws” many states had. You couldn't go shopping, drinking, or engage in many forms of entertainment on Sundays. I remember when I was a youngster, the only store in town that was open was the Uni-Mart convenience store in the middle of town, so one could get those absolute necessities one may need, like milk or bread, or an 8 year old like myself, a candy bar. Yet over time, those laws have largely faded away.

In the Orthodox Jewish community, however, the Sabbath is taken very seriously. You don't cook, you don't drive, you don't do anything that isn't absolutely necessary on that day. You either walk to synagogue, or sometimes, the men would actually sleep at the synagogue on couches provided Friday night to not have to exert effort to get there on Saturday morning. You would cook all the food you needed the day before so nothing needed to be prepared on Saturday. Though like eight year-old me sneaking a candy bar at the convenience store, there are many tales of Jewish youth stealthily listening to a baseball or football game on a radio in their room on the Sabbath.

It's into this tradition that our gospel lesson brings us today. When presented with a woman crippled by a deformed back in the synagogue on the sabbath, Jesus calls her over, lays hands on her, and tells her she is “set free from her ailment.” This clear violation of Jewish doctrine draws the ire of the leaders of the religious community. They criticize not only

Jesus, but the woman, saying that there are six days of the week she could have come and been healed, but not on the sabbath when even healing the sick is work that is prohibited. Yet Jesus points out their hypocrisy, as they feed and water their own livestock on the sabbath, so that they may not suffer, yet they begrudge setting her free from the bondage of her infirmity on that same day. His choice of words is an important point in this passage. He compares her healing to being set free from her bondage. Such imagery would resonate with the Jewish audience, as this concept of sabbath was closely tied to the story of God freeing them from bondage in Egypt. The Ten Commandments were received during that exodus and time in the desert of the Sinai. That symbolic word choice would not be lost on his audience. From that perspective, how could they not allow God to extend grace to this woman on the holiest day of the week. Jesus' argument with the leader of the synagogue is that he might be doing too little on the Sabbath. Especially, he might be doing too little of the kind of things that really matter to God. He might think he is keeping the rules, but he is overlooking some real needs, some basic needs of people who have come to the synagogue, to God's house.

By contrast, the issue for many Christians today is not doing too little on the Sabbath, but doing too much. Doing too much is just as much a problem on Sunday as it is every other day of the week. Often we find ourselves overwhelmed by the over-programmed pace of our busy, modern lives. Long gone are the quiet Sundays of family gatherings for dinner. Yet despite our different perspective on the Sabbath than our Jewish predecessors, for many of us the term "sabbath" still conjures up a list of things not to do. Whether by divine command or human law, there is a historic tendency to think of Sabbath as extremely limiting our behavior. This tendency contrasts sharply with a culture that makes little distinction today between Sunday and other days of the week. What if instead of cramming Sunday full of activities like other days of the week, Sunday were a day that we lived fully into the spirit of being set free by Jesus, like the woman in our story today.

Jesus sets us free as his body to participate in the healing of God's creation, to seek God's kin-dom drawing near. Through the crippled woman, Jesus invites us to join with her in celebrating our freedom by living into God's mighty acts of healing wherever we find ourselves. Maybe that means befriending someone who is hungry and homeless, or caring for creation in our local community, or mentoring a young person in challenging circumstances. When we live into God's healing work in the world, then we are fully alive as God's children. This story is also a reminder that healing is found through grace, not through static doctrine and practices that cannot adapt to new circumstances.

As we think about how we can more fully embrace living out our sabbath freedom, let's also give thought to what rules, practices, and doctrines we may cling to that prevent God's grace being extended to those who desperately seek it. Who might we exclude, or not quite affirm just as they are, that might walk through our door? Can we share the healing grace of God as we are, or do we need to make some changes to be the space for those suffering in mind, body, or spirit? My hope is that we can embrace the positive freedom that the

sabbath offers us, and can find ways to step away from the busyness of this world to seek and share the healing that can only be found in God's grace and the kingdom that exemplifies. Amen.

A Call to Serve

The Divine source is the one from whom all blessings flow. We have an eternal invitation to bring our resources to God's house to use for the building of kingdom and as seed that there might be a continual harvest. These acts reflect the God who knows us and the God who calls us.

A Time for Reflection – Musical Interlude

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Fount of Every Blessing, receive these gifts in the joy in which we bring them. May they bless your church universally, our community and our world. May none suffer lack and may we always give from generous hearts. May we always take joy in being blessed to give and to share with you and each other. Amen.

Hymn

Come, Thou Fount

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Benediction

As you depart from this sacred space, do so fearlessly for God's word is in you. Go and build a beloved community wherever you roam and plant seeds of love, faith, and hope. Amen

Postlude