

Finding Rest  
September 22, 2019  
Luke 13:10-17

When we're young, we learn about the importance of rules/laws. A sign that's red and has eight sides means STOP. You should never throw a ball in the house. You can't smoke/drink until you are a certain age. However, there are some really funny laws across the United States that make you wonder how they became laws. For example, it's a felony to poach and/or harass Big Foot in the state of Washington. In Florida, it's illegal to sing in public while wearing a bathing suit. In Idaho, you can't gift a box of chocolates that weighs more than 50 pounds. These are only a few of the weirdest laws in our great nation. Still, I have to wonder how much good all these rules and laws do. In no way do I condone breaking of laws, but we still have to consider how much all the rules and laws we have, both the spoken and unspoken, restrict us and get in the way of doing God's work. This is the same issue we run into with today's reading, where there are many laws that get in the way of the society Jesus lived in, some of which Jesus breaks or invites others to break in this very passage.

One law that's broken is in regards to where this all happens. The temple in that time period was laid out in a very specific way. On the outside was what's called the "women's court," where the women worshiped. Further in would have been where the men worshiped, a little closer to the altar and God's throne. The story takes place more than likely in this second court, where men worshipped. Jesus invites this crippled woman forward so that she is in the "men's room" so to speak. So, already Jesus is probably getting a few raised eye brows and/or frowns. It doesn't stop there though. The woman is crippled. Those who were sick, disabled, possessed, they were not even allowed in the "women's court." So, this woman, by encouragement of Jesus, has already gone two stages past where she would have otherwise been allowed to be.

Next, Jesus lays his hands on her, a woman who is crippled/disabled. At that point in time, anyone who was sick, disabled, crippled, possessed, basically not 100% well was deemed "ritually unclean," and to touch someone who was "ritually unclean" made you yourself "ritually unclean." Jesus knows this, but he lays hands on her anyway, knowing full-well the repercussions of such an action.

As if that weren't enough, the big law being broken is in regards to when this happens: on the Sabbath. It is unlawful to work on the Sabbath, as says one of the Ten Commandments. The head rabbi even points this out to the crowd, saying people are allowed to come to the temple for healing any of the other six days of the week. Just as a quick summation then, Jesus is inviting a "ritually unclean" woman into the "men's section" of the temple and healing (i.e. "doing work") on the Sabbath. In a matter of thirty seconds, he has caused four rules/laws to be broken. We as readers are left to wonder why he is breaking all these rules.

Jesus does these things for four reasons.

1. Jesus heals on the Sabbath *because* it is the Sabbath. The Sabbath is supposed to be this day of rest, and Jesus points out that everyone there uncouples their cattle from the plows and such that the cattle too might rest. The slaves, servants, and hired

hands would all have the day off, metaphorically uncoupled from their burdens/responsibilities. This woman has been weighed down for 18 years straight with no relief, and finally she finds relief. She has finally been uncoupled from her burden. On top of that, the burden of not coming into contact with anyone, even her own family, that has been lifted off her shoulders. She is made well. Not only can she worship with the regular people, she can return home to her family once again. Plus, the Sabbath was initially established to worship God for freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, when they were “uncoupled from their burdens.” Jesus does here much the same as what God did for the Israelites in Egypt.

2. He touches her because he knows that he cannot become ritually unclean. He is the only person in the Bible who spreads “cleanliness” to those he touches. As opposed to receiving her illness, she takes on his wellness. The cleanliness exits him and enters her, as if to say that no one is beyond hope of healing, that God can and will heal everyone.
3. Jesus invites her into the men’s section as a sign that no one should be closed off from God, regardless of who they are, what they’ve done, what might be wrong with them, etc. The “standardized faith” of the time put rules and laws in place that denied access to God for those who truly needed such access. Imagine a moment a hospital that doesn’t allow the sick to enter its doors because they might get others sick or the doctors/nurses might get sick themselves. It doesn’t make sense, right? Well, the temple had rules/laws that limited who could enter the temple, where they could go, etc., therein essentially denying spiritual healing, forgiveness, etc. to those who need it most. So, Jesus opened the door for her to receive that which she needed more than any of the men: forgiveness, healing, peace.
4. By opening the door for her by bending a few rules, the men there, including the leader of the synagogue, realize just how much the rules get in the way of their being in a relationship with God and how they too should be taking greater action to help those in need, to give them a Sabbath of their own.

In the end then, what this boils down to is unlocking the door for more people to be saved. The last couple weeks, we’ve discussed seeing the world as God sees it. This means seeing those in the world that are either physically crippled/sick, like the woman, or those who are spiritually sick/weighed down, like the synagogue leader. In calling ourselves followers of Christ, we are called to do Sabbath work, which means giving Sabbath to those who have no Sabbath. If a person is weighed down by their burdens, we are called to help relieve them of that burden, so that they might rest. If a person is sick, we are to help them see that no one is beyond healing and that they too shall be healed. However, we must also be able to look at ourselves and evaluate our need of Sabbath as well. As theologian Sally Smith Holt puts it, “When we become obstacles to ourselves or when institutionalized religion becomes a force that prohibits us from experiencing and worshipping God, it becomes exceedingly clear that each of us requires the mercy and healing power that Jesus displays in this passage.” **So, in closing, I invite you all to evaluate what rules, burdens, etc. are preventing you from either helping others to find rest or to find rest yourself.**