

Proper 16C Luke 13 10 to 17 August 24 2025

We heard in today's reading from Luke that Jesus had been teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath.

He saw a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years.
Luke tells us that
“when Jesus saw her,
He called her over, and said
'woman, you are set free from your ailment'”

Jesus **saw** her.
Luke makes a point of telling us this detail.

How many good and faithful worshipers had the woman encountered, before she was finally seen?

It is easy to not see someone,
especially if they don't appear to be useful,
or interesting,
or important,
or are different from what we believe to be normal.

But Jesus **saw** her.
And He healed her.
On the sabbath.

The leader of the synagogue was indignant.

This indignation is understandable, really.

The leader of the synagogue was responsible
for ensuring that worship remained unsullied.

It was quite clear in the third of the ten commandments

that no work was to be performed on the sabbath.

The commandment says
“remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.
The seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.
You shall not do any work.”

And healing was considered to be work.

To the Jews of that era,
obeying all the commandments...
not just the big ten, but all six hundred thirteen of them...
was serious stuff.

The writings of the prophets were rich with references
to the consequences of failing
to follow the commandments,
and were also filled with a lot of “I told you sos”
when those threatened consequences came to pass.

To the leader of the synagogue,
following the commandments was a huge deal.

Especially with the Roman Empire
poised with a sword at the throat of his nation,
his faith,
and his way of life.

And here was this wandering rabbi,
flagrantly violating one of the most important of the commandments.

Of course he was indignant!

But, what the leader of the synagogue didn't seem to grasp
is that anything can become an idol.
There are the usual objects

that we think of when we say the word “idol”...
perhaps a golden calf.
Perhaps Baal.
Perhaps ambition, or power or money.

An idol is something
that we believe is of supreme importance,
something that we invest with the attributes of divinity.

Something that we spend our time and energy
pursuing with religious devotion.

An idol is something –
anything –
that replaces a relationship with the true God.

Following the rules can be such an idol.
The commandments,
such as the one that Jesus broke,
to “remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy”,
were given so that we would always be aware
of God's presence in our lives,
aware of God's role in our very being.

This awareness was meant
to foster a relationship with God.

Instead, in the hands of humans,
it often fostered mere obedience,
obedience which met the letter of the commandments
while ignoring the purpose for which they were given.

The commandments were,
all too often, idols
that replaced a search for relationship with God.

The leader of the synagogue seems to have been blinded
by following the rules,
believing that by his obedience,
he was close to God.

Then Jesus zapped him with a reality check.
Jesus saw the woman and the pain she suffered,
and freed her from her affliction.

There was no internal debate,
no telling her to take two aspirins and call him in the morning,
when it would not be a violation to heal her.

He just did it because she was in pain and needed help.

Today, we generally recognize the ten big commandments
as sufficient to help us in maintaining
a relationship with God
and all of god's creation.

We are free to eat bacon,
to mix different fabrics in our clothing,
and to associate with any one,
without regard to the status of their ritual cleanness.

Yet we still need help in reaching that relationship.

I have a noisy soul.
It is hard for me to just be,
to just let go.
My mind wanders,
it finds stuff to think about, it worries.
It often counts the stairs in a flight of steps,
just to fill the quiet.

Sometimes I will wonder if I left the sprinkler running

when I leave home for a trip,
imagining the consequences if I did not.
Or did I turn off the burner under the soup pot?
And is that pain a sign of something serious?

All of this noise makes it hard to listen,
it makes it hard to step outside of my concerns,
and makes it hard to be fully open to any relationship.

There is always that background noise,
like the constant drone of cicadas.

Fortunately, as Episcopalians we have liturgy.

I have talked with folks who don't like liturgy.
They say it's boring.
They say that we do the same thing over and over again.
They look for excitement and novelty.

I have recently realized that liturgy
is really just meditation
with a verrrrry loooonnggg mantra.

The ritual,
and the language,
and the motions and,
if you are a ten thirty person,
the music,
are designed to let our awareness
ignore the cicadas droning in our souls
as we engage the mantra of the liturgy.

We can drift along in the familiar seas of the liturgy,
giving our noisy minds something to do,
sort of like giving an irritable toddler a toy.

When we can shut off the drone,
we can be open to listening.

Not to hunt it,
but to just be still
and allow the presence of God to suffuse our being.

In liturgy, we can relax into the rhythm of the ritual,
we can let the cadences carry us
into a quiet space where we may be still,
and come closer to an awareness of God.

This awareness is not something we can command.

God is not some genie,
who appears when we rub the lamp.

Though God is always there,
always present,
it is we,
with our noise and our needs and our self centered ways,
that keep God at bay.

And it is in the meditation found in liturgy
that we can draw closer to God.

In the stillness,
we are more able to bask
in the presence of our Creator,
more able to identify the God self we all carry in our souls.

It is also in the liturgy that our oneness is emphasized.
We all share in the same body and blood,
we all share in the same prayers,
and the language and actions of the service.

We are all created in the image of God,
and are united into one being with God
by that act of creation.

We are told in our reading today that Jesus “saw her”.
He **saw** that she was in need.
That awareness of one of God's creatures
is what enabled Him to see her,
when so many had consigned her to the invisible margins.

He could see her
because He was not trapped
inside the echo chamber of His mind,
with His sense dulled by the droning of self centeredness.

He was aware of her,
and felt her need.

And He acted,
first by seeing her at the margins where she had been confined,
and then by curing her affliction.

Both are healing acts.

This awareness is God's plan for us.
God wants each of us
to let go of the noise within our souls,
that we may recognize the loving God seed in our hearts,
and in that seeing
to recognize that all others are sharing that same seed.

We are all one.
Each of us with all others,
each of us with God.

This is our reality.

Becoming aware of that reality is our quest.

Amen.

- Pete Ruppel