

No Body Un-Cripples Themselves [Scott Kinder-Pyle]
Luke 13:10—17

One of my earliest memories took place on a Sunday—which as far as I knew was just a day-off, a break from school, a mini-vacation, a time to catch up on chores. And the memory went like this: my father, who during the week, worked his greasy fingers to the bone as a car mechanic, would be sitting at the kitchen table and listening to the radio. He had his cup of coffee, his *Marlboro Lites*, his ash tray and, with an anxious little pencil, he scribbled down numbers on a pad of paper, and listened, as if his life depended upon it, to a program about real estate—about buying and selling properties. At that same time my mother, having gotten dressed to go to church, would be making sure her seven year-old boy had brushed his teeth, combed his hair and was wearing that itchy white shirt with the clip-on tie. And I remember walking to the church on the corner of Ashland Avenue and Chester Pike and how the car traffic was noticeably less congested. And I remember drinking grape juice, eating cookies, and singing all the verses of “*This is My Father’s World...*” before returning home to watch... a football game.

Now, I’m telling you all this to strike a contrast; and here it is: ***Sabbath*** is not a *Day-Off*, but rather the counter-cultural practice in which we *stop* working to meet the desperate quotas of our days, and finally *rest* in the rhythms of who we are—who God has called us to be. That is, if we happen to define ourselves by physical stature, by the jobs we have (or have had), by how much money we make (or have made), by the number of leisure activities we can cram into a weekend, or even by the moral crusading we can do by insisting that everyone believe in the Ten Commandments, Jesus has something to teach us. Jesus has something to teach.

And in Luke, chapter 13, that's precisely what he's doing. He's teaching in a crowded synagogue, and he very well might have been perusing passages like the following:

- Genesis 2:3—***“So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it because on it God rested from all the work God had done in creation...”***
- Exodus 20:10—***“But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns...”***
- Deuteronomy 5:15—which adds this intriguing statement—don't just remember that you're a part of creation—***“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out...”***
- Jeremiah 17:21—which describes the bustling city of Jerusalem, just prior to the Babylonian invasion, and the destruction of the temple, when the prophet says, ***“For the sake of your lives, do not bring a burden into the city gates...”***
- Isaiah 56:2—8—when the Babylonian invasion and occupation was over, and the exiled Jews and others were returning to sheer desolation, and God says, ***“To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths... I will give an everlasting name that shall not be cut off... Thus, says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel...”***

All these scriptures (and more) are on the radar of Jesus, and have undoubtedly informed his ministry since the time he took leave of working as a carpenter's apprentice. And whenever I imagine him teaching, everyone is entranced with the way he can formulate his ideas. Everyone is stimulated, captivated and motivated. But this morning, please take a look at how Jesus doesn't just settle for nice, abstract interpretations of the Bible; he actually *embodies* Sabbath as he's confronted with the *appearance* of a bent-over woman, who stoops so low she can't even look him in the face. Nevertheless, she's there; and Luke tells us she's crippled with 'a weak spirit,' and has been 'bound by Satan for 18 years.' And without skipping one beat in the lesson, Jesus calls her over and addresses her directly: ***“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”***

Now, here we are at Northwood Presbyterian, a good 2,000 years away from when the commotion at the synagogue supposedly occurred. And I get it: we'd prefer *not* to get so worked up. And we'd probably prefer to *not* be called out of the crowd so abruptly—and yet, so seamlessly. But humor me for a moment as I invite you to consider two perspectives: the first clothes you in the tunic of the synagogue leader, who never engages Jesus in direct dialogue, but instead broadcasts his opinionated moralism to the crowd in general: ***“There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day.”*** And the second would be the woman herself, who simply stands up straight, sings a doxology and when Jesus associates her with the ox and the donkey who are led from the manger to water, she just keeps on praising; and in verse 16, Jesus identifies her as ***“a daughter of Abraham.”***

So, you see, those are your options and those are my options. Like ***“the leader of the synagogue”*** I can boisterously interject my opinions about Sabbath. OR—I can take the time to enter into the Sabbath Rest *with my body*—AS A BODY—that's beloved by God. And yet, what I'd like to point out regarding *anybody* who would like to propagate their opinions about Sabbath in general is that THEY ARE WORKING; they're working to win approval; they're working to impress, to get the applause. And it's for this reason, Jesus calls them ***“hypocrites.”*** Think about it. The work that we do—the work from which we need rest— isn't just the work that we do to put food on the table, or to live comfortably into retirement. We perform certain kinds of work to make an impression; and the reason we want to make a favorable impression (sometimes desperately) is that we secretly don't believe that we're loved already; we've secretly forgotten how to rest with ourselves, as ourselves—DAUGHTERS AND SONS OF ABRAHAM!

There was a woman I used to visit in a nursing home; and she was only about two years older than me. And when I entered her room, I noticed pictures of her fly-fishing and going on hikes with heavy back-packs. And I also saw an ornate plaque, hanging on the wall above her bed, which thanked her for her years of service in a prominent government office. She in fact had spoken and taught classes on various legal issues. But, you see, because of something known as Pict's Disease, she now sat hunched over and could barely speak. On good days, she'd promenade around the corridors of the Memory Care unit. And yet, when I caught up with her on a bad day—on a Sabbath Sunday—this sister in Christ, this daughter of Abraham, leaned into me with her frail shoulders, convulsing, and wept until she smiled; and I thought two things:

1. I thought *why, God?*
2. I thought *I'm glad I'm here. I'm glad for once to not be preaching a sermon, performing for the crowd, which I've been prone to do, sweating out whether people will like me. But I'm glad to be here, shoulder-to-shoulder with this bound-up and yet beautiful human being.*

Are you getting this? I hope you are. Walter Brueggemann was an Old Testament guru, who recently died in June, and in one of his books, he writes:

Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.

Which means—no BODY is, or ought to be defined or valued by the work they do. Even the work we do at church. On Sundays. Our worth is yoked to the covenant that God makes with us in Christ; and it's a covenant that includes our bodies, even our bent-over bodies.

“I thought you were going to get me at recess. I thought you were going to get me at recess. I thought you were going to get me at recess...” His name was Bobby Haines, and what he said to me in the seventh grade, just after lunch and just before recess, took my breath away—and also culminated one of the most formative days of my life. Here’s the back story: Bobby was a frail looking kid, with a bowl-shaped hair-cut, a squeaking voice, and around his neck, he wore the key to his front door. Back in elementary school, he was my friend, and one of the things I learned about Bobby as we played together through the years was that his mother worked all the time; and his father was no where to be found. So, in the afternoons, this pale-faced, frumpy friend of mine used the key around his neck to let me into his house; and, without any adult supervision, we had the run of the place; we could drink sodas, chow down any number of *Cheetos* and *Twinkie’s*; and we could play hide-and-seek in every part of the house, even in her mother’s closet, where she kept her gun in a shoebox, behind the laundry basket. Bobby and I had some really fun times. But you know what happens when the hormones begin to rage and little boys start seventh grade? Sometimes the peer pressure kicks in; and that’s what happened to me, when I was working really, really hard to fit in with the cool, athletically-built kids; and so I announced, how I was going to take the opportunity of RECESS—that mid-school day Sabbath — to put Bobby in his proper place. I was going to beat up on the weak kid. And yet, apparently, the weak kid got wind of the threat through the teenage grapevine and the rest belongs to the history of my body being punched and pummeled by the weakest kid in the seventh grade.

You see, all I can do today, these fifty years later, is to speak for myself. I come to this Sabbath Day as that same beat-up body; and I’m going to speculate that you’ve have your bruises too.

But listen again to this announcement: ***You are set free from your ailment.***

You, little boy, trying to be all macho, you're set free.

You, little girl, trying to hide that you've been sexually or emotionally abused, you're set free.

You, middle-aged man, buying that sports car, desperately trying to be young again...

You, middle-aged woman, believing that you need more make-up or plastic surgery to be beautiful...

You, queer person...

You, non-binary person...

You, street person, with your cardboard sign, reading, "Will work for food..."

You, the Hispanic immigrant...

You, the African American.....

You, old man, worried about clogged arteries in your chest...

You old woman, mourning the loss of your spouse of so many years, forgetting his name, forgetting your children's names...

YOU ARE SET FREE from your ailment. You're not bound by it. Not trapped in it.

And now, do I dare lay my hands on you? Do I dare tell you that you're accepted, you belong, you're loved... Do *we* dare, in the name of Christ Jesus, un-cripple the bodies?