

## **Released on the Sabbath — Rev. Denise Stone**

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In today's text we find Jesus teaching in the Temple. In the Gospel of Luke, the first time we saw Jesus teaching in the Temple was in chapter 4 where he was in his hometown of Nazareth. There he declared,

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the  
captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”<sup>i</sup>

He was rejected for this by those he grew up with. They did not understand what Jesus was about.

Today, we encounter a synagogue leader who did not understand what Jesus was about either.

Here is the scene... Jesus is teaching his disciples and others gathered at the synagogue. In the back of the area is a woman, hunched over – unable to stand up straight. Scripture says it was for 18 years. That could just be shorthand for a really long time.

Regardless of how long it was, she was probably accustomed to feeling invisible. People might have ignored her, or stared at her. Similarly to ways people with some type of disability are treated today.

Scripture doesn't tell us if she had come to the synagogue that day expecting to meet Jesus or if coming to the synagogue was something she normally did. Scripture tells us that Jesus sought her out, not the other way around.

Jesus reaches out to her, touches her and releases her from her bondage. She does not ask for healing from her affliction, And Jesus heals her on the Sabbath.

Jewish people set aside their Saturday's for the observance of Sabbath. The week begins on Sundays and Deuteronomy 5:13-15, which the synagogue leader quotes, states,

<sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>14</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

During the time of Jesus, how the Sabbath was observed was a point of much debate (this is actually still debated among Jewish scholars). The Pharisees had many rules on how to observe the Sabbath, and they strove to observe every one of those rules.

So here is a situation where Jesus steps into this controversy.

Jesus had just healed a woman on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader is incensed.

Now when you are upset with someone or something they did, how do you respond? Do you take up the matter with the person in question or do you take it up with others? I believe we all know the correct answer to be that we take it up with the person in question. The synagogue leader does not do that.

Verse 14 states, the synagogue leader “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.’”

Jesus responds by calling the synagogue leader, and those like him (not the crowd gathered) hypocrites for picking and choosing how to best observe the sabbath.

Before we jump too hastily at making the synagogue leader the bad guy, Jeannine K. Brown suggests, in her article from Working Preacher suggests,

First, the synagogue leader's complaint is, on the surface, a faithful reading of the Torah: the seventh day was set aside by God for Israel's rest, and work was prohibited on the Sabbath (e.g., Exodus 31:14). Second, Jesus' response is not a rejection of the Torah rulings about the Sabbath. Instead, he argues *from* legitimate allowances of

restricted kinds of "work" on the Sabbath (13:15). These kinds of discussions were common in Jewish dialogue regarding the Sabbath. Then Jesus argues *for* healing on the Sabbath based on the great worth of the woman as "a daughter of Abraham" and the appropriateness of healing on the Sabbath. What better day to heal (bring freedom) than on the Sabbath?<sup>ii</sup>

Can you imagine what it was like to be the woman in this story? Her life is completely transformed by her encounter with Jesus. And the religious leader that she has been taught by criticizes what Jesus has done for her.

As Jesus points out there is no better day than the Sabbath for God's liberation of a "daughter of Abraham" from her physical (and social) bondage, the crowd rejoices and Jesus' opponents "are put to shame."

I would think this unnamed woman experienced a roller-coaster ride of emotions that day. She went from just a normal day to unexpected joy, to embarrassment and back to joy.

What is our take-a-away from today's text? How do we apply this to our own lives? How can we interpret this text in light of people who have physical or mental disabilities?

There are more questions than we have time to answer. I encourage you to explore the questions you might have on this text and consider how they impact you personally.

For now, let's think about how Jesus fulfilling his own stated purpose from Luke chapter 4 in his encounter with this woman gives us some marching orders.

Jesus declared that God had anointed him to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. That is exactly what he did for this woman.

We live in a world that is currently riddled by division. We are divided along ethnic lines, racial lines and gender lines. We are divided from country to country, and from political party to political party.

Jesus did not come to take sides. Jesus came to provide freedom.

Jesus' self-declared purpose should be no less than our own. THIS IS the role and responsibility of the church and of all Christians.

We need to ask ourselves are we doing what God has called us to do? Are we proclaiming good news to the poor? Are we providing liberation to those in bondage? Or are we being more like the synagogue leader, saying we can't do that here, we can't do that today? These are hard questions to consider.

I want to put two more questions to you this morning. Are you allowing Jesus to call to you and release you from your own bondage? And if so – are you rejoicing to all that will listen about the work Jesus has done in your life?

This woman's life was completely transformed by her encounter with Jesus. Let our lives reflect the transformation, and joy that comes from OUR encounters with Jesus. Live our lives with evidence of the freedom Jesus offers to us – and offer that freedom to those around us!

Pray with me.

*Dear God, remind us of your great love for all people, and especially for those who are oppressed in mind, body, or spirit. Grant us courage to take our stand for them each day. Help us to accept your healing and freedom as well. Help us to see that we are not alone in our struggles. Help us to share the deliverance you have offered to us with those whose paths we cross. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.*<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=665](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=665).

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from Prayer by David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2013/10/luke-13-10-17/>.