

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Psalm 103:1-8

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

It seems only fitting that the Lectionary gifted us with these readings as we finish up our sabbatical time and look to welcome Mother Elizabeth back in two weeks. We end with where we began. We've come full circle now in our own journeys with rest, re-setting, and re-creation in this sabbatical time; and these readings light the path for us on why we honor Sabbath and what's next for us personally and communally.

While the specific details are different, this text might sound familiar to you in genre. A healing story in Luke, Jesus heals someone who was on the margins of society. She was suffering for a long time, bent over and broken. She didn't ask to be healed but Jesus recognized her need. In healing her, Jesus upset those in authority and shocked them by his proclamation of "why" he needed to heal her. Controversy abounds once again for Jesus.

The controversy that came from this moment is well-named by those in the synagogue as Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. In a very general sense, to keep the Sabbath Day is to be invited to remember that God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day after creation and to remember freedom from oppression and slavery in the Exodus. As we know, there are guidelines and regulations on how to honor the weekly sabbath. One of The word itself means to cease, to stop all work. Honoring this day then is a prayerful discipline and an opportunity to honor God's pursuits in our lives, not our own- a time set aside to recognize that God is the creator of all living beings who brings release from oppression and restoration and wholeness. It's a day to remember and to observe.

The leader of the synagogue draws out his criticism of Jesus by focusing on Jesus' work on the Sabbath. But Jesus pushes this leader and encourages him to look deeper. Yes, one thing the commandment points to is to cease work, but what does the spirit of the law say? Jesus highlights the call to take upon God's holiness on this day- to clothe ourselves in the very essence of the divine. To remember God's spirit within us and notice

when our brothers and sisters are in bonds that need to be freed. Our role is to not control God's working, but to be channels of God's love, casting aside that which brings pain to us individually, to our neighbors, and to our community. It is utterly necessary for Jesus to do this work on the Sabbath, and it's utterly necessary for us to do the same. With Jesus it's almost always a both/and, not an either/or.

The Olympics are about to come to a close. Throughout these two weeks we've heard numerous inspiring stories about those competing. In one story, after a collision about halfway through the 5,000 meter race, New Zealand runner Nikki Hamblin was down and out. But she wasn't left behind as American runner Abbey D'Agostino stopped mid race, reached out to her, encouraged her to get up, and finish the race. The New York Times says, "Instead of running in pursuit of the others", but it could be read as instead of running in pursuit of the win, pursuit of the medal, pursuit of her own goals she chose another path. Following the rules of the game she should've kept going, but chose to do something shocking which would leave them both in last place.

What's next when we listen to the quiet of the Sabbath time? This sabbatical time has been a season for our church and for Mother Elizabeth, but honoring the Sabbath time in our lives is not seasonal. When we listen to the gift of the Sabbath, we hear about pursuing God's interests, not our own. If Jesus followed the interests of humans, this woman would not have been healed, would not have been restored to wholeness, would not have been loosed from the chains of her illness. This woman was excluded from the Sabbath for 18 years, but Jesus extended grace for her to delight in this day and in her life in God. Both Isaiah and Jesus clue us into this idea of Sabbath by rest and the celebration of creation, and being set free from what binds us and helping bring about healing in our neighbors. Isaiah's community was fasting, they were following the ritual and the law, but something was missing. Their relationship with God and their community was broken, and their purposes were selfish. When they, and we, are reminded how much of a gift Sabbath time is, we then are led out of that time remembering how to serve God's interests.

So, what does this all mean for our community? Currently, we are exploring what it means to host the homeless on our property with Tiny Houses- and getting them into permanent sustainable housing. We will begin our fall soon with the delightful worship in Evensong returning. Our Thursday night programming Exploring Life and Faith will focus on Mission & Outreach and what it means theologically In listening to God, how do we as a community continue to grow into our mission to Seek the Renewal of the World?

And personally, I encourage you to continue reflecting on these past months which we set aside for Sabbath. My prayer is that in this season you were able to walk closer in your relationship with God, discovering new ways or maybe remembering some ways that touched you in the past that helped you remember God's presence in your life. We need to be reminded of this spiritual discipline so it becomes a natural part of us. That we can remember God's loving work in creation, and how to extend that in our loving work in service to God to the world. To pursue God in our lives, whether it be Sabbath time, or work time, or something in between, is

never ending, and can come with challenges and surprises. It can lead us to remember and observe, and it can lead us to recognize what we're bound by to release it. But the spirit is about the delight of worshipping God. Because being sent forth and what comes from this time is always worth it.