

## Luke 13.10-17

*<sup>10</sup> Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. <sup>11</sup> And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' <sup>13</sup> When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup> But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, 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.' <sup>15</sup> But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? <sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' <sup>17</sup> When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.*

We see throughout the scriptures in accounts of the great miracles of Jesus' ministry, that many times the signs and acts he performs challenge the religious understandings and assumptions of his time.

As people seeking to live in accordance with the way of Jesus. We should all ask ourselves what teaching we can draw from these verses for our own faith today.

On the historical level, it is important to understand not to read these verses as a conflict between Christianity versus Judaism. Jesus is a Jew, and he understands the law and certainly its importance.

His interactions with the religious leaders of his day are addressing the law and the practices of first century Judaism of his time. Jesus's teaching within in the Synagogue is from Jewish tradition but he teaches with authority as Messiah. His observations and his contentious exchanges throughout Luke and other Gospels are from the perspective of an insider who is challenging those within his own tradition.

In a sense the leader of the Synagogue no doubt when he criticises Jesus indirectly when he addresses the sees himself as defending the fourth commandment, to honour the Sabbath and it keep it holy. He is doing what he believes is right, perhaps he worried at the power that Jesus demonstrates, but his argument according to the practices of his day would have made sense to people and also to Jesus. Acknowledging the Sabbath strictly understood as a day of rest. It is after all the 4th commandment of the Ten Commandments, so not to be taken lightly.

Jesus' act of healing is provocative, it is teaching miracle that is mean to convey something about God and his kingdom, just like the parables in Luke which convey mysteries of the kingdom of God.

His action intentionally raises difficult questions and pushes many of the people and certainly the religious leaders of his day outside of their comfort zones. It is important to note that the woman appears has not come seeking healing but to pray and worship and Jesus calls out to her, while he is teaching.

It seems Jesus is deliberately challenging existing understandings of his day which he believes are getting in the way of seeing what is truly important in relation to these teachings. According to Luke these healings on the Sabbath day seem to be of tremendous importance because a very similar episode is recounted later in the Gospel while Jesus in a debate about the law with the Pharisees in Luke 14:5, It reads, "And he asked them, 'Which of you whose son or ox falls into a pit on the Sabbath day will not immediately pull him out?'"

He makes a similar point. Jesus is confounding the religious leaders of his day by the way he directly challenges their authority, and it is interesting to highlight that to do so, he focuses on the everyday practical aspects of life. Jesus shows the hypocrisy of the leaders of his day by highlighting the simple accommodations, or adjustments to legal code that they would allow. Pointing out actuality that they make exceptions all time to law out of necessity. Jesus in referring to the Oxen, is actually making a reference to Laws for the shabbat Exodus 23 verse 12 "Work the first six days of the week, but rest and relax on the seventh day. This law is not only for you, but for your oxen, donkeys, and slaves, as well as for any foreigners among you."

He is saying in a sense, according to the way this is presented in the law you could not even do the most basic simple things not even for cattle, but you would never interpret it the law in this way, and how hard must your hearts be to deny God's healing and liberation on the Sabbath day, which has freed this woman and praises and glorifies God? This points not only to their hardness of heart but also the way they are defensively responding to Jesus own authority by denying the good he is doing.

It is important to note Jesus is not downplaying the Sabbath at all. Through his teaching he is trying to show that there is a deeper meaning behind the commandment. The Sabbath was intended for the good all, even for the animals to provide a much-needed rest from labours of the rest week. But the intention is violated when it becomes an excuse not to meet the needs of those around you. If one would not allow your oxen to go without water or allow your ox to remain in a ditch because this would not be for their good. So, it is not right to deny a person an act of healing for sake of conformity with religious code. This interpretation is perhaps best in Jesus words in Mark 2:27, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*"

Jesus' message to religious leaders of his day does imply that we should abandon obedience to law and good order. Not at all but the interpretation must always be balanced with intent of law and with a sense of God's grace and mercy.

Jesus is teaching us that Sabbath was meant to provide rest and restoration, not to be used as an excuse to punish or dismiss God's work when it is being done for the good of others.

I believe these episodes on the sabbath can carry over also to the interpretation scripture and our own assumptions about the faith. These verses remind us that even the authorities and perhaps us, may hold on to a sense of self-righteousness miss the larger point of God's teaching.

Perhaps we may not be able to spot our own hypocrisy, those little accommodations, or exceptions we make for our own convenience, or out of practical necessity, in our own lives. While perhaps at the same time we judge others according to standards we too either do not or unable to fully meet.

Orthodoxy and good order are important, and authority is necessary to ensure them in both church and society, but we must beware that even good things such as, law and doctrine can be

misused in such ways as to deny reality of those around us. I think of those tempted to blame the suffering of the poor and afflicted on their own moral failings or lack of faith. Or think of punitive measures that harshly punish and criminalize those suffering from addiction placing them in jail rather than providing treatment and help.

What I draw from today's reading is that we as believers need to have open hearts and minds when responding to human needs and to remember that Gospel is good news because it upholds human dignity, joy, and freedom.

To close, Jesus' teaching in our Gospel today while centred upon the fourth commandment applies to other areas of faith. Those who put strict religious codes or precepts above human healing, restoration and liberation are probably missing the point. It is important to point out that Jesus acts with a messianic authority have, but his message to the leaders of his day is clear, is they should see the good he is doing for its own sake but are unable to because of their own hypocrisy and self-interest. We should always be examining our own lives those blind spots, those blind spots in our own understanding of our faith.