

Isaiah 58:9b-14
Psalm 103:1-8
Hebrews 12:18-29
Luke 13:10-17

Sermon August 25th, 2019

Access to God through Christ

If we were to look back on our childhood and remember how we were parented we would see that some of the rules our parents set for us to live by helped us grow, and some of the rules didn't. If we remember what school was like we would see that some of the rules our teachers set for us helped us learn, and some of the rules didn't. If we remember what it was like to be part of a faith community or social club we would see that some of the rules set by the community leadership helped us be loving to others, and some of the rules didn't.

As parents, or any authority figure for that matter, we try to set rules that help us learn and grow into loving people. The laws that God passes down to Moses were meant to help people learn and grow into people who love God and their neighbor.

Unfortunately, we are imperfect beings that have tendencies to become driven by power, control, money. We have tendencies to look out for our own self-interests over the well-being of others. Sometimes we create or interpret rules whether on paper or in unwritten form in a way that end up making it harder for us to love one another. Harder for us to experience God's love.

In our gospel this morning, this woman who has struggled for years with both mental and physical health problems, appears in the synagogue to hear Jesus speak. Jesus sees her pain. Calls her forward. Shows her compassion. Heals her from her pain. Liberates her from these problems that would have prevented her from being an accepted member in society.

Now there is one detail we don't want to overlook. This healing takes place on the Sabbath, which isn't so good for Jesus or the woman. Some of the people get angry as what Jesus has done is perceived as work. They scold the woman for coming on the Sabbath to receive healing. Of course, no where does she actually approach him for healing. Jesus sees her and calls her over. And this woman is in obvious discomfort. How often does she find enough strength to leave her dwelling place? Maybe this is the first time she has been out in days.

No matter what the circumstance or rationale for this act of healing some are angry. A rule has been broken. This woman should have been left alone until sunset. Or in other words this woman needed to wait to experience God's healing love.

Now it is easy for us to become so frustrated with the people who are angry at Jesus for showing this act of kindness. Yet, how often have we created or interpreted rules in a way that have made it more difficult for people to experience God's love?

At times the church hasn't been the most hospitable place. Sometimes we have created or interpreted rules in a way that have made it more difficult for some people to experience God's love. Sometimes these creations or interpretations were motivated by our understanding of what it means to live the right way. Sometimes these creations and interpretations were motivated by our need to feel comfortable. Sometimes these creations and interpretations were motivated by power and self interest. Whatever the reasons, when I am out in the community I come across too many people that have disconnected from the church. They share their stories and I come away thinking that at times our rules didn't inspire growth and love of neighbor, but instead hurt people creating a barrier between them and God's love.

On the other hand, how often have we found ourselves standing in the shoes of the woman? Maybe you grew up in a community where you were unable to contribute in certain aspects of social life or religious life because of your gender or your race or your age or something else that seemed to separate you from the norm. Maybe there was a standard set there. An unwritten rule. Or maybe these rules were written down in constitutions or other legal documents making it even harder to contest. How do we feel when the rules create a barrier between us and God's love?

And then there is the pain, the wounds that become a barrier on top of the laws that have become a barrier. How often did this woman lay awake at night angry at God for her pain? Angry at the faith community for rejecting her? When we experience rejection, or continued suffering because of these laws it strengthens the barriers that exist between us and God's love.

Well, Jesus chooses to heal the woman despite the reaction of the crowds. Jesus then explains himself. Jesus reminds the witnesses that the rules are created to help us love God and one another. Jesus isn't scrapping the law, he is interpreting the law in the way it was meant to be interpreted. Sabbath is meant to draw us back into loving God and one another. If we are able to untie our animals so that they can experience the sustenance to live healthy on Sabbath. Why can't we liberate this woman so she can experience the sustenance to live healthy on Sabbath?

Jesus challenges us to see that through Jesus the barriers are lifted. Jesus gives us access to God's love. Jesus invites us to interpret these laws in the same way. To see them as an opportunity to reflect God's love, not hinder people from experiencing God's love. And when we feel a rule is creating a barrier, maybe it is okay to go back and reflect on our interpretation of this rule.

Because God wants all of us to experience God's love. This is why God sends us Jesus to liberate us from those things that get in the way of us experiencing this love. And to inspire us through this love to live out the rules in a way that gives others an opportunity to experience God's love through us.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you send us your Son to liberate us from those barriers that seem to make it harder for us to experience your love. May we too break down these barriers that prevent others from experiencing your love. **Amen.**