



The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior

Sabbath Survival Kit



THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST, AUGUST 26, 2007

Early Christians referred to Sunday as the Lord's Day, the eighth day of the week, the day beyond time in which a new creation is born. We gather this day for new beginnings, eager to be recreated by the Word who raises us to new life. Jesus insists that the older sabbath, too, is intended to be a blessing, not a strict rule.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, mighty and immortal, you know that as fragile creatures surrounded by great dangers, we cannot by ourselves stand upright. Give us strength of mind and body, so that even when we suffer because of human sin, we may rise victorious through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

FIRST LESSON - ISAIAH 58:9B-14

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

SECOND LESSON - HEBREWS 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.") Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 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. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 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." 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? 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?" 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.

It's almost ironic that if you are reading this reflection it's because you're not able to gather with the community of faith in worship on our Sabbath day this Sunday. If you read through the lessons too quickly you might have thought the lessons were about Sabbath keeping; what's appropriate when it comes to worshipping on the Sabbath day.

But if you look more closely, it's not so much about what you do on the Sabbath as what can happen to you on the Sabbath. Take the gospel reading from Luke. Jesus is teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. There's a large crowd that has gathered, of course, and everyone is pressing in to hear what Jesus has to say. But then something very peculiar happens. Just then there appears a woman with a spirit that has crippled her for eighteen years. She's so racked with scoliosis that she completely unable to stand up straight.

Now is Jesus day the Jews believed that if someone was sick it was because they had sinned. Remember the story of the man born blind? Remember what Jesus' disciples asked Jesus? Teacher, who sinned, his parents or this man that he was born blind? So if a woman has been crippled and bent over for eighteen years it must be because she is racked with sin and shouldn't be touched.

But Jesus notices a woman and calls her over. Now it's not as if Jesus sees her sitting in the front row and calls her over. In those days only the men stood in the front and women were to either stand in the far back or in the balcony, locations of less honor and dignity. So when Jesus calls her forward you can imagine how that must have looked as she made her way through the crowd. People must have been doing everything they could to avoid touching this woman who so clearly must have sinned terribly to be crippled so severely.

And then Jesus tells her, "Woman you are set free from your ailment", and when he lays his hands on her immediately she is able to stand up straight. And of course, she then begins praising God. Horrors! Jesus speaks to her and then touches her! How could he intentionally defile himself in such a way? Yet he does, and the woman is healed. She is set free from that which held her bound and captive to a life where she could never look up, but only at the dirt and ground beneath her. And when she stands up she looks up and gives praise to God.

Of course the leader of the synagogue has a problem with this. Healing is a work. According to the law of the Sabbath there is to be no work on the Sabbath. And so, before there is a mad rush of other sick people to the front in order to be healed by Jesus the leader says 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."

But that's just it. We do come on the Sabbath day to be healed. We come to worship bound by Satan with a spirit that has crippled us in one or another way, seeking God's healing grace to heal us. We come bent over with the fear of losing a loved one who is near death or maybe even our own due to illness or age. We come crippled by the fear of not having enough income to cover our cost of living and so continue in a job that is a labor rather than a joyous and meaningful vocation. We come bound by a fear of being alienated by friends, coworkers, neighbors or even family if we were to live our life according to God's will.

What is it that has you crippled and bent over today? What is it that you long to have Jesus lay his hands on you and proclaim you are freed from your ailment? The woman in the story didn't go to the synagogue expecting to be healed. She just went. In fact, if healing wasn't allowed, it was the last thing she expected. Yet, she was healed. Her life was changed by the word and touch of the Lord. She was transformed by Jesus and she immediately began praising God for her life would never be the same again.

That's what can happen on the Sabbath, whether we expect it or not. That's what can happen when we hear God's word of new life proclaimed to us in the readings, sermon and hymns. We can hear God's word of healing and mercy. We can hear God's word of forgiveness and new life to us in our lives, and we are able to stand up straight again. Our lives are changed. We are transformed. And we need not be bent over or bound by Satan again when we trust in that word of new life and healing.

Sure there will be those who try to suppress this. Like the leader of the synagogue there will be those who will say, "That's not what's supposed to happen in worship." There will always be those who believe all worship is meant to be is simply an hour of routine we are obligated to do because we're good citizens and that's what a good Christian is supposed to do. Show up every week for one hour, and one hour only, but don't expect anything to happen, especially not to them.

But something can happen. We can be changed. We can be set free from that which has us bound and bent over in fear of death and suffering. We can be transformed into the likeness of Christ and live out of the new life the resurrection offers. And when we do there just might be some hands and voices raised in praise of God's saving grace and power in our lives. Now wouldn't that be an exciting worship to attend? Listen to God's word in your life this day. Expect to be changed. Tell him your fears. Ask to be unbound. And may you stand up straight as you offer praise to God in Christ.

BLESSING Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.