

Perhaps it Says Something Proper 16, Year C – Luke 13:10-17

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 25, 2010

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Last week, not long before I got started on this morning's message, Larry Courtney and I were looking at the creation stories in Genesis as part of Larry's preparation to start the Diocesan School of Ministry next month. Anyway, we got to the part about God resting on the seventh day, after the labors of creation and I remembered the context of this morning's lesson from the Gospel.

We don't even *think* much about the Sabbath these days, but that's an issue that has been growing for a very long time. In my studies, I found that the observance of the Creator's primeval obligation, the fourth of the Ten Commandments (the third, if you learned your list as a Roman Catholic), was so much in peril by the late nineteenth century that the 1888 Lambeth Conference of all the bishops from throughout the world-wide Anglican Communion thought the issue pressing enough to include it in their report. "The increasing practice..." they said, "of making the [Sabbath] a day of secular amusement is most strongly to be deprecated." And that was in 1888.

In *today's* fast-paced, technological, consumer-driven society, perhaps it says something about *our* priorities that we say practically *nothing* about the Sabbath. Nowadays, Church leaders and conventions and councils talk on and on and on about declining numbers and the eroded influence of the institutional church. We talk on and on about liberal "issues" on one side, and about conservative "values" on the other. We talk on and on about sex and schism and a great many other things that snatch at the headlines, and the instant sound bites, and the blogosphere and the Face Book world and the Twitterverse. Perhaps it *says* something that, in all that talk, we say next to *nothing* about keeping one day of the week set aside for rest, worship, and religious teaching.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus once again confronts those who give him a hard time for healing on the Sabbath. And who wouldn't agree with that? Surely showing compassion and working for the dignity of every human being is appropriate on any and *every* day of the week. We applaud Jesus' opposition to the Pharisee's restrictive, legalistic view of the Sabbath. We say "Hurrah for the Son of God." We take a bit of delight that Jesus put those guys in their place.

And then we turn the page, thinking, "Okay, I'm glad we don't have to worry about *that*." But when we hear about our freedom from the strictures and the legalism of first-century Pharisaic piety, perhaps it says something that we then feel free to say *nothing* about the gift that God intends in commanding that we "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy." In Jesus, we *are* set free from all those first century, Pharisaic legalisms, but, as I have asked many times before, for *what* are we set free?

Are we free simply to add ten more hours to our work week... or twelve... or fifteen? The American work ethic is our culture's vaunted secret of success. But as we sell our lives in daily and hourly and sometimes minute-by-minute doses, we buy back the very chains from which Jesus tried to shake us. What's more, our personal workaholic obsession often means that those who work *with* us or *for* us *never* see a day to which we have not added something to *their* burden. Perhaps it says something that the Church says nothing about our apparent lust for the work of 24/7 weeks.

Are we free simply to participate every day in our consumer culture, every day making purchases, every day acquiring, every day accumulating? Half a century ago, we began talking about the phenomenon of "keeping up with the Joneses." These days it seems we are all always chasing the richest, or the biggest, or the quickest thing to fill our mouths and our bellies. We are always tracking down the hottest and hippest fashion with which to clothe ourselves. We are always fighting to be the first to get our hands on the fastest, flashiest mode of transportation, the fastest, flashiest mode of communication, the most up-to-the-minute machine that goes "ping." And six days are simply not enough to keep up, are they, as with very few exceptions, the great American retail army sells the Sabbath to stand ready to meet

our demands. Perhaps it says something that the Church too often says nothing about our greed for more and more and more.

There was an episode of the old *Andy Griffith Show* in which, sitting on the front porch after a good Aunt Bea Sunday dinner, Andy and Barney get to remembering the “good old days” of Sunday band concerts in the park. As they set out to recreate that blissful rest of yesteryear, the laugh is that they eventually drag all Mayberry into the exhausting and ultimately futile search to capture what had once been free. I’m not so sure it’s all that funny today. We never miss the chance, it seems, to compete, to excel, to keep up. We never miss the chance to complete one more activity, to add one more achievement to our wall. And in case you’re sitting there saying, “So what’s so bad about that, preacherman,” how about when we end up doing the same thing with and to and *through* our kids? Perhaps it says something that the Church says nothing about our frantic compulsion to fill *every* day, every minute, every *microsecond* with *something*.

“You hypocrites!” someone might say. “You have been set free,” he might say. Perhaps in this story of a woman set free on the Sabbath, Christ *does* have something to say about our freedom.

For one thing, we have been set free for *rest*. We need it, and not so surprisingly, our Creator *knows* that we need it. Children and adults need rest. Executives and bus drivers need rest. Students and teachers need rest. Nurses and builders and homemakers need rest. We are mortals, and the Sabbath reminds us that we are creatures, with real bodily needs, to stop, to replenish, and to just *rest*.

Sabbath reminds us too, that we are dependent, that God is God, and that we are *not*. That simple reality means that the job of Creator of everything there is, seen and unseen, is taken. The job of redeemer of the world, is taken. The sustainer of all creation, is taken. That means that *we* can stop trying to do what we *cannot*. We should keep the Sabbath simply because it was *God* who told us, “remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”

And we have been set free to worship the One who made *all* our days, to immerse ourselves in God’s time, in God’s eternity. We have been set free to step aside to this beautiful and holy space to produce *nothing*... but praise the One who has given us this freedom. We have been set free to take at *least* this little bit of deliberate time, to consume *nothing*... but the love of the One who made us for love. We have been set free to open our hearts and to open our minds and to open our *selves* to the One who made us simply to *delight* in us. We have been set free to rest wholly in the presence of God; where we are valued, not because of what we make, not because of what we do, not because of what we earn, not because of what we deserve, not because of what we know, not because of what we contribute, not because of what we achieve, but because of who we are, as Children of God. Perhaps it says something that the world can say *nothing* to change or challenge that sure truth.

We don’t hear anymore about the woman cured by Jesus in the synagogue that Sabbath day. We don’t hear what happened after she raised her no longer crippled hands in praise to the God of her salvation. We don’t hear about where she was while everyone else was debating the true meaning of the Sabbath. We don’t hear about where she had gone when Jesus explained the true value of Sabbath to a bunch of hypocrites, and the true value of a single child of God. I *suspect* that, having been so profoundly and irrevocably touched by the “consuming fire” of God, the poor bent woman stood up straight for the first time in a long, *long* time and went home... to rest in the Sabbath. Perhaps it says something that the Gospel says... *nothing more*.