



Praise God! Praise God! Praise God! (Luke 13:10-17)

I always enjoy our bookkeeper Emrys Lloyd Roberts' e-mails. Now as those of you who are charged with the stewardship of our business and finances know, Emrys' e-mails and correspondence are not always filled with great news. Although in fine positive thinking fashion, he usually starts with that. Emrys e-mail will contain good news. But further down, it may also contain news of budget deficit, or announce the arrival of a suspiciously large water or tax bill that Glenys, who is as tenacious and vigilant a church steward as they come, is trying to track down. But after all the news and the notice of the attached monthly budget update, Emrys' e-mails always end with "Praise God!" which always makes me smile no matter what the news. Praise God! We sing it every Sunday. "Praise God from whom all blessings Flow, Praise God all creatures here, below, or high and low, or however the version of the doxology you like to sing goes. We gather here during our Sabbath time together to worship and to Praise God!

Making time to come together and praise God is what keeping the Sabbath holy is all about for us. Now many of us tend to treat this matter of keeping the Sabbath rather casually. For most of us, Sabbath involves an hour of public worship. And outside that hour we may engage in recreation, or work, or shopping, some of us may enjoy a movie, or have a massage or an afternoon nap. I think we would do well to recover a sense of holy time, a sense of the call of the Hebrew Bible to "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." A sense of time to honor and Praise God that goes far beyond our worship time together and trickles into our play and work, and quiet time, and maybe even into our e-mails which become little sabbaths. Its easy for most of us to see that the synagogue leader in our scripture reading this morning made the mistake of missing the forest for the trees, and being too legalistic and rigid about the observance of the Sabbath. In his rigidity he missed the miraculous life altering healing that Jesus offered to the woman who was bent over out of the love that was flowing from his heart. But before we judge the synagogue official too harshly, I also believe we are more likely to err by being too casual about the ways and time that we make to honor and praise God, which is what keeping the Sabbath is all about.

One of the ways we are called to honor and praise God and make the Sabbath holy is by opening ourselves up to the healing, transforming power of Jesus Christ. Jesus knows where we need healing, he already knows our deepest need. But we have to answer his call to let him touch the things in our lives that need healing.

In our scripture reading today a woman, who has been bent over for eighteen years stands up straight after her encounter with Jesus and begins to praise God. She has a lot of reason to be praising God. This woman who Jesus heals in our story today has been crippled for half of a lifetime in an age where life expectancy is 36 or so. Her affliction is being "bent over." She could not stand up straight. We are not told she is in pain, but I expect that would probably be the case in an age when one could not pop a



couple of Tylenol or Advil, or in worse cases a Vicodin, or Percocet to get rid of the aches from having your neck in a strange position for hours and hours. And probably worst of all, she is forced to look down at the ground. She could probably never look people in the eye with contorting herself, which I would imagine that would make being in relationship with other people very difficult.

Her infirmity, here is described in our scripture reading as "bondage to Satan." And I imagine it would feel like an evil curse or bondage to have to go around staring at the ground all day, and to never be able to look at the sky, or look others in the face easily. But Jesus sees the woman's bondage and he calls her over. There is no mention of the strength of her faith. There is no mention of prayer or of him laying his hands upon her. His words are enough. When you walk the earth with the kind of "word made flesh" authenticity that Jesus did, when his words and his actions met up, centered in who has was as the Son of God, wonderful healings took place. His words "woman you are set free from your ailment" was all it took. Now in the midst of this incredible act of power, there are plenty of breaches of Sabbath decorum for the powerholders of the tradition to be upset about including, Jesus calling attention to the woman, and touching her, risking ritual defilement, and doing actual work on the Sabbath day. But none of that matters to Jesus. He wants the woman to be whole. It is his reaching out, his call to her... a call that she answers that sets the stage for her healing and for her shouts of Praise God!

I believe this morning that Jesus is calling us all over for healing. And that we are all called to be in constant process of opening ourselves up for God to prune away and heal the things in our lives that keep us bent over and looking at the ground.. we are called to let him prune away the things, like anger, and resentment, and bitterness, and rigidity, and resistance to change in our lives that keep us from being rooted in the vine of Jesus Christ. We are called to be in relationship with him through prayer. We are called to practice the clutter clearing practice of forgiveness, and we are called to live authentically in his example, even when we know we must depend on the mercy and forgiveness of God because we will never be able to do it the way he did.

Now you have probably figured out by now that I strongly believe that being an engaged spirit filled progressive Christian in the twenty-first century requires more work than just coming to worship to sing praises to God in the doxology for an hour each week. We are called to keep the Sabbath in myriad ways outside these doors and in this hungry and thirsty world in which we live by actively placing ourselves in the process of hearing the call of Jesus Christ to the kind of healing in our lives that will lead all of us to shout "Praise God!" And be ready to be God's hands and eyes in the world.

There are plenty of dying mainline churches around if this feels like too much work, or if you would like to just worship one hour on Sunday morning and not be bothered with doing the work of prayer, forgiveness, and authenticity, and being open to the healing of Jesus Christ during the rest of the week. There are also plenty of more conservative churches that are thriving because they offer less complex yes and no answers and the legalistic boundaries of the synagogue official. As I mentioned last week, I would be more than happy to help you find one of those churches if you don't feel comfortable



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with the deep commitment that it takes to walk in the authentic example of Jesus Christ and be a progressive Christian in the 21st century.

Because, as you indicated last week, with reaffirmations of faith, and your affirmation of the mission of this congregation, and with your "Amens!" and tears, and smiles, and hugs, and shouts of praise to God, we are not and will not be a dying congregation here at San Lorenzo. Instead, you affirmed that we are called by Jesus Christ to be a living, thinking, holy spirit breathing, welcoming, open and affirming, God Praising, place where Jesus Christ calls each and every one of us to healing and to wholeness and to stop walking around bent over and looking at the ground and be filled with gladness and the healing power of Jesus Christ! Praise God!

I invite you to give some thought and prayer this morning to how Jesus Christ may be calling you to keep the the big and little Sabbaths in your life. We are called to make time for intimacy and worship with God both in our quite time and on Sunday as a community. We are certainly not called to rigidity and legalistic yes and no interpretation of scripture and law, that much is clear from Jesus' response to the synagogue leader. Instead we are called, to healing, to wholeness, to stand up and Praise God as we offer ourselves up so he can transform us and heal us into spreading the gospel in ways that he never could have in his short time here! We are called to keep the Sabbath and to praise God in countless ways that will transform our lives and the lives of those around us with the healing power of Jesus Christ.

Say it with me! San Lorenzo this sanctuary has been too quiet for too many years, wandering in the wilderness, in bondage to lack of vision, criticism, and despair. And now, you have made it clear that is to be no more. Let's Praise God! this morning about the healing of Jesus Christ, about the reformation of our church, about the new pentecost that is in our midst as we follow his call, forgive each other, pray for his guidance, walk authentically, stand up straight, look up at the sky and into each other's eyes and keep the Sabbath together! Praise God! Praise God! Praise God! -Amen