

## TFTD 2025.17: Monday 24th March

### Rules Glorious Rules: 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.”

So, just how important are these rules in today’s passage? For the Pharisees the rules are very much cut and dried. Of course, the devil is always in the detail – what did the rule “to keep holy the Sabbath” actually mean? What was work and what was not? People didn’t want to break the rules unknowingly so the leaders of the synagogue argued about what people could and couldn’t do on the Sabbath. Eventually these oral arguments and traditions were written down to cover every aspect of daily life.

There were specific prohibitions having to do with baking bread, making a garment, or building a structure and so on and so forth. There were also lists about what you can do: spend time with family, eat food prepared earlier in the week, attend worship, sing, extend hospitality, and study the Torah.

And as Jesus points out in today's Gospel, you could also water your livestock. But the rules got ridiculously specific. If your house was burning down, you could ask a gentile to put it out, but you couldn't do so yourself. There were even rules about how far one could walk on the Sabbath day.

Clearly Jesus was not following the rules as the Pharisees interpreted them. Jesus sought to help them get beyond the letter of the law, to understand what the law was intended to achieve – a right relationship with our God. Yes, there are rules, but we don't just follow them for their own sake. Good rules exist for a higher purpose. Sometimes we have to break them to make that point.

When Jesus entered the synagogue, he saw a crippled woman who was invisible to everyone else. He saw a daughter of Abraham, who had a terrible burden, she did not ask for healing, because she had no idea she was worthy of it or that it was available to her. Jesus acted on his own authority and he did it out of compassion and in doing so he demonstrated another understanding of Sabbath to the people.

The Sabbath is not a day of the week; it is a state of being in God's time. This time cannot be measured with a clock and a calendar. As Christians we ritually live this out every Sunday in the celebration of the Eucharist. When we come to the altar and receive the bread and wine, it is God putting a foot into our time, and we put a foot into God's time.

God's time is where we know fully what it means to be human. Where we find forgiveness and reconciliation with each other, where we are released from those "things done and left undone." Jesus is referred to as "the Lord of the Sabbath." He embodies both ordinary time and God's time. In healing the woman, he did not break the Sabbath, he extended it to her. Under the old rules she was at the synagogue on the Sabbath but she was

also excluded from being fully part of it. Jesus changed all that, reminding us that Sabbath time is anytime we take time to seek oneness with God or extend that oneness to someone who feels outside of God's love.

Lenten blessings, Linda