

Set free the Sabbath

Rev. Jen Crompton, St. Ben's Los Osos, 8/ 21/2022

In the name of the creator, redeemer, and sustainer, amen.

When I was in my mid-twenties, my life changed in an instant. I found out that my cancer had returned, and they weren't sure what my prognosis would be. I had a choice I could choose to be bitter, or I could choose to get better or at least that's what the button I found online told me. I knew I could lean into my faith and my community. My perspective on life would forever be changed. In some ways, I can empathize with the woman in the synagogue. I often wonder what it would have been like to be seen by Jesus. To be chosen out of a crowd and healed or to be a witness to what we sometimes interpret as healing or mercy. To have been the woman in the synagogue. Only able to see one way, most likely, the ground maybe not able to turn or look upward because of her ailment. She is only able to have limited access, limited mobility, and possibly a limited quality of life given her context. But on that day, Jesus notices her, lays hands on her, and liberates her. She stands up straight. Her perspective is forever changed, and she can do

nothing else but praise God. I know many of us present know what it's like to have our lives changed in an instant. Maybe the outcome wasn't to be healed miraculously, yet I would imagine that you can relate to having your perspective shifted. While we sometimes focus on the healing aspect of this text, I would like to also focus on the words set free or released. Jesus has liberated this woman and also welcomed her back into the community by laying hands on her and reminding those present that she too is a daughter of Abraham. This phrase is important in this context because it signals to those present that this woman belongs. She is equal. This text calls us to look at where in our own lives we need to heal and break free from those things that might be holding us back from participating in the liberating, life-giving love of God. Maybe there are places in our lives where we need to heal, give ourselves some grace or extend grace to others.

The text lets us know that no matter where our healing needs to take place, it isn't ours to carry alone. God is there to help us. Our reading from Isaiah speaks to the nature of God's walk with us as we care for the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted. As we are called to act,

God will be with us. I appreciate the active nature of this text. It is a reminder that we not only discern God's call in our lives but also act upon that call. I find Isaiah and the active nature of the text interesting because of its seeming contradiction to the idea of the Sabbath and the day of holy rest. Yet as I explored more, this idea was not simple or binary, but as most things related to the mystery of God was more complex and intricate.

In preparing for this sermon, I read multiple commentaries, which are books or short articles written by other scholars, preachers, clergy, or folks who study biblical texts. The one I found most compelling gave these two descriptions of the Sabbath.

“God gave the teachings to the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, where Israelites were slaves. God's command to rest, to set aside one day of the week as even God did to rest their bodies and their livestock and retreat for a time of renewal and prayer.” and

“The spiritual giant, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, said: “Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath, we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are

called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”

With such beautiful descriptions, I wonder why we haven’t worked harder to keep this practice.

Now, this last version may be a more updated version of ancient practices but still captures the essence of the importance and holiness of the practice. Get me right here I don’t read this text as a flipping the tables kind of argument, but simply a conversation between colleagues as Jesus explains his position on the law and the synagogue leaders explain theirs. I hear these kinds of conversations within our congregations and communities often. It’s a complex conversation about rules and exceptions. The text is calling us into a conversation about our own practices. Texts that ask us what we really value. And how we are asking God to walk alongside us as we make difficult decisions and have difficult conversations.

We often get caught up in our day-to-day tasks, so focused on one thing after the next, or as a community, we get so focused on doing things in

certain ways that we develop tunnel vision or think we just don't have the energy to do one more thing. We are stuck looking down, unable to see the sky or turn our heads. We have to ask for healing, to be set free from the systems and pressures that bind us to ways that may no longer serve us. We must ask for the strength to walk through that door of healing when it opens. We must lean into our faith and remember that God will show us the way. God has gifted us with so many wonderful people willing to serve. Maybe we don't need to do it ourselves. I wonder what else might be stirring in the hearts of this congregation near and far.

For me, our texts today are a reminder of the liberating, life-giving love of God. They challenge us to explore what healing means to each of us and what our ideas of the sabbath are. Finding ways to discern God's call in our lives will always be an important part of our community. Our texts for today share some important calls to action, rest, and healing.

I want to come back to the part of the text that sometimes doesn't get discussed, and that's that, as a Modern Society, we seem to have lost sight of what a sabbath practice could or should look like. Many of you

might have an individual practice, but as a collective, our ability to rest is somewhat nonexistent. I can't think of a day when everyone is simply allowed to rest their bodies, minds, and spirits. Sabbath has become a luxury in some ways. To be able to have a day off work or time of rest has become something of privilege in our context. Our time and how we spend it is often complicated by many factors like how many jobs one must work, if you are caring for other people, do you have access to medical care and so many other complex factors. As we begin to understand our communal loss of this practice, we continue to see the need for liberation, justice, and equity. Everyone deserves the ability to rest their body and spirit. And everyone deserves to be liberated from the systems and injustices which keep them from living life to the fullest. What could it look like to provide a space of rest and healing for those in our community? I think that St. Ben's is very much that place for many here and joining online.

When I first heard about this Trailblazer position, I was so excited. If I could have written a job description for my first call out of seminary, it would have looked very similar to this position. A mix of community

organizing, pastoral care, and administrative practice with a sprinkle of social justice work. To walk alongside a community or communities, ask questions, and help them put their passions into action. To be paired with such amazing communities is far beyond my expectations. To be back in a higher education setting has been both challenging and fulfilling. As I learn a new system and what the needs of students are as campuses re-open to in-person learning. Like this community and the challenges faced after the initial re-gathering period. As communities re-center themselves, I notice the collective grief, pain, and exhaustion, as well as the uplifting messages of hope that have also emerged from the healing that has begun. As we continue this work of repentance and reconciliation, I hope we hold ourselves gently. This is active work happening here in this community and among others. I see it happening in the outreach programs here and in your interest in calling this position to be a part of your community. To actively seek someone who will walk alongside you, ask questions and maybe challenge a few things along the way is not easy work. I know many of you have been doing

this work well before my arrival and my hope is that some of you will be interested in

joining the discovery team and seeing what opportunities lie beyond the church's walls for community connections and possible ways of engaging different populations with our church community. I want us to dream together and explore why St. Ben's is the place you call your spiritual home. In the conversations I've had thus far, this community is unique. It has so much to offer, and I genuinely believe that there is something beautiful that can not only be shared with the community but that the community can share with the people of St. Ben's. There are so many gifts here, and the welcome here is something truly spirit filled. The way a community comes together and takes care of its members is part of the communal ministry of this congregation. As I have said and will say as many times as you let me, I have been truly blessed to feel this welcome.

Yet we often find it challenging to extend this welcome to others outside of our church context. I often wonder what stops us. As we

explore this and other questions together, I know we will find new perspectives as we heal, learn and grow together.

I pray that as we all move into this next week together, we find hope and comfort in the love of the liberating God who heals and frees us. Amen.