

God's gift of the sabbath

Notes on the Bible readings

- In today's passage, Jesus is accepted and admired as someone with a knowledge of Scripture who teaches with authority, but on this occasion he goes against the tradition of curing only life-threatening illness on the sabbath, and the religious leaders suddenly change their opinion of him. The leader of the synagogue is so preoccupied with the exacting letter of the Law that he completely misses the miraculous wonder that God is at work; Jesus has brought healing and joy to a woman after 18 years of suffering and social exclusion.

- The religious leaders are so confined by their own rules about the sabbath, they miss its sheer delight (Isaiah 58.13). According to the prophet, it is not about regulations but a day of humbleness and thankfulness, a time to respect God and care for others rather than 'pursuing your own interests' (v.13). Jesus shows compassion to the woman – nowhere in Scripture does it teach that one should not have compassion on the sabbath; more importantly, it encourages us to rejoice always.

- The first act of the healed woman is to stand up straight and praise God, from whom she may well have felt cut off, and the crowd rejoices with her. What is our natural instinct? To follow our own rules and take credit for our own success, or to see God at work in all we do, and to give him the glory through praise and rejoicing?

Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you see in this oil painting?
- ▶ What makes you feel confined?
- ▶ When do you experience having freedom to rejoice?



A prayer of approach

God whose kingdom can never be shaken, we let fall the encumbrances of the week and draw near in worship with reverence and awe. Amen.

A prayer for others

Lord God, we rejoice in the fact that you are loving, healing God: heal all those sick in mind or body.

Lord God, we rejoice in the fact that you are gracious God: pour your grace upon those who are mindless of the sabbath and seek to follow their own interests; may realisation bring them to your feet in worship and praise.

Lord God, we rejoice that you are God who meets needs in times of trouble: bless the people of our emergency services who have to work today.

Lord God, we rejoice that you are redeemer God: bring into relationship with you all those bound by their own rules, and those who do good works believing that they are enough for entry into your kingdom; release them into your freedom and the knowledge of your foundation that can never be destroyed. Loving, healing, gracious, redeeming God, hear our prayer. Amen.

A personal prayer

Lord, help me to walk tall and to rejoice each day in the freedom your love and kindness crowns me with. Amen.

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Live your faith

Keep a look out for rules, traditions or habits that constrain you from doing something good and loving. Can the rule be broken? If so, and you do, make sure you praise God!