

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Psalm 103:1-8

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

Sabbath

And on the seventh day he rested. Part of the issue that we have to struggle with is this idea of the Sabbath. Certainly the critics, who were looking for anything to trip Jesus up with, focused on this idea that on the Sabbath no work could take place; that the Sabbath was set apart for the worship of God. Different faith groups have taken this more or less literally. The Amish, Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians take this part very seriously. In an area close to where we lived in England, the gates would be closed at Sundown on a Friday, the swings chained up; and no food could be prepared, or work undertaken and the limit of how far anyone could walk was marked on the Telephone poles.

The Judaism of Jesus' time expected that too which is why there is a fuss about his healing of the bent over woman. Jesus berates them for their hypocrisy. Which stems for this notion of what is work? The lesson Christ aims for, is that we do not refuse to do the work that still must be done. The giving of comfort, of solace, of care. Of healing to those who have need of it and that to limit that is not our place. My thinking is that this is about the interpretation of what God's work is? It is also about the interpretation of worship?

Yes, that includes what we do here on a Sunday, but if you ask our youth they may well tell you that they feel closest to God, that they are part of something greater, that they experience greater connection when they are DOING God's work – like feeding the poor, helping the lonely and dispossessed, working to bring more joy to the lives of God's children.

So the question is what is worship? What is God's work? And when should it be done? On the face of it – we can glibly say “all of it?” But this is about an attitude as much as anything! The washing of dishes and feeding of pets, is God's work if we frame it as part of the joy of living – not as a chore.

But beyond the mundane lies more – this woman comes, bent down with her ailments. We know nothing else about her. But she is also bowed down in Spirit – Jesus says that: ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage”;

Part of healing that is done on the Sabbath is not just about mortal things, but also about the spiritual. When we are engaged in God's work, there is a spiritual element that transcends the work aspect. The people listening to Jesus knew it and heard it as truth. Our youth know it, which is why they find Christ in action. WE know it when we serve others. But as our lives unfold, and we are challenged we come to realize that spiritual solace and joy is in sacred prayers, the sacrament and the music. That the gift of healing is two way. There is the healer and the willingness to be healed. When we come before our God, In Christ's name, we come to do his work and his work be done to us. God created and rested when all was good. The truth of our brokenness is that the restoration of the Kingdom is still a work in progress.

Every one of us here is bowed down by the weight of uncertainty right now. Our sense of security is being tested. But here is the good news. No matter how much this fear, this fire of uncertainty consumes, it will not and cannot consume our faith and hope. If we keep our focus on what Christ has asked of us, to continue the work, to give thanks, to be open to the receipt of the healing of the spirit then we can look with hope and thanks beyond the uncertainties of our time.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

The Rev. Sheelagh A. Clarke

St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
Monmouth Jct. NJ