

What does it mean to serve God and honor God's commandments? The best place to look to know how to serve God is of course in the person and life of Jesus Christ. We see in our gospel passage for today just how Jesus put pleasing God ahead of pleasing the people around him, how Jesus followed God's intentions for his life even though many of the religious leaders of the day didn't like it and may have even been a little afraid of him.

In our passage Jesus is in the synagogue, and it's the last time in Luke we will see him teaching there. Amongst the people who are there is an elderly woman who is bent over with a spinal affliction that she has had for 18 years. That's a long time to suffer with any kind of ailment, especially one that won't let you stand up straight. She doesn't go to Jesus, she does nothing to get his attention, she doesn't ask for healing in any way; and yet, Jesus notices her and calls her to him, lays his hands on her and heals her. Actually, the wording he uses is that she is set free from her ailment—in other words, the affliction was from a spirit, and Jesus drove out the spirit. Immediately she stood up straight and began to praise God—as anyone who had been healed of an 18 year old, painful and debilitating illness would.

But there's a glitch in the happy moment. This day is a Sabbath day, and the leader of the synagogue protests the fact that Jesus did work on the Sabbath. "There are 6 days for work to be done, but not on the Sabbath; come on those days and be cured, not on the Sabbath." Now this seems pretty cruel to us, I think; I can't imagine any days better than the Sabbath on which to end someone's suffering. But the religious leaders of the day, in an attempt to define what it meant to be "holy" made narrower and narrower guidelines for what could be done on the Sabbath and what could not. When you look at the 10 commandments, the 4th commandment says "honor the Sabbath and keep it holy." There isn't much more to it than that, other than some commentary.

To provide some background, the 10 commandments are found in two places in the OT; they are found in Exodus 20, and it's also found again in Deuteronomy 5. In Exodus the commentary grounds the 4th commandment in God's creation of the earth (for 6 days God created the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh he rested, in order to appreciate and "delight i creation) while Deuteronomy places it within the context of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery to the Egyptians (remember that you were slaves in Egypt but that the Lord led you out of that land.) As Scott Hozee tells us on "The Center for Excellence in Preaching" weblog, *the Sabbath day is a reminder that God has liberated us from all that is evil and injurious to human flourishing – (See more at:*

[http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-16c/?type=the_lectionary_gospel#sthash.HTCoZtIE.dpuf)

[16c/?type=the_lectionary_gospel#sthash.HTCoZtIE.dpuf](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-16c/?type=the_lectionary_gospel#sthash.HTCoZtIE.dpuf)) When Jesus healed the woman with the bad spirit, he set her free, he redeemed her from captivity to the spirit—how much more appropriate could

it be that she should be healed on the Sabbath day! And Jesus made the point quite clear by comparing his healing of the woman, which was forbidden, to the people bringing their animals to water for a drink on the Sabbath, which was allowed. He was pointing out that the rules as the religious leaders of the day had interpreted them, put the welfare of an animal above the welfare of a human being, a daughter of Abraham. The point was, compassion trumps law, no matter what day of the week it is. This was hard for his opponents, which the text says, were put to shame; but Jesus, knowing what God's intentions for the world are, was able to do and say the hard things, knowing that the Father and the Spirit were with him.

There are times in which we all become bent over with the weight of life, so much weight that it might seem as if we are bound by some kind of evil spirit. And indeed many people do believe in evil spirits and I myself don't discount them entirely, though I tend to see things from a more modern point of view; still, sickness and mental torment and chronic poverty and drug addiction and many other afflictions we face today often seem to have no explanation other than sin and evil. The person who is sick doesn't want to be sick, even if they have brought it on by smoking or drinking to excess or even just abusing their body by working it too hard. Mental illness is very hard to understand—why doesn't the person who is depressed just cheer up? Why doesn't the person who hears voices just ignore them? The person who is addicted to drugs doesn't get up one day and say, I think I'll become an addict today—and while their choice to use a drug is their choice the addiction is not. Chronic poverty often stems from economic policies beyond a person's control. It is the out of controlness that makes us feel sometimes as if we're being punished by God or inhabited by something evil. And the sad and disturbing thing is that being bound by these afflictions keep us from living into God's intention for our lives—especially when we become embittered by our afflictions or cynical about a loved one's behavior.

We can also see this binding in our churches today. We are trapped in a mindset about how church should be, trapped and bowed under the weight of trying to keep something going that is passed its effectiveness date. The mid-20th century model of church that grew out of the end of WW2 doesn't work so well anymore; there are many reasons for this including the fact that the rate of change in our world is accelerating and comes in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. An example from a book I'm reading called "The Missional Leader" this story: before personal computers, since the time of Gutenberg (who developed movable type in the Western world) newspapers and books had been printed by typesetters, who perfected their craft and often passed it down from parent to child. It was a skill that ensured job security and stability of life. In the 70s personal computers had become common enough that typesetting was no longer needed; and even though typesetters' unions kept their jobs going for a while, eventually the job became obsolete. The rise of personal computers could

not have been foreseen nor could it have been stopped. Personal computers as well as the television have create a world in which we are inundated by information 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Again, it is a change that couldn't have been imagined at the beginning of the 20th century; yet 116 years later life for many of us revolves around the acquiring and processing of information—oftentimes more than we can handle.

The problem is that these changes, and more like them, have left the church unable to address the needs of people overwhelmed by life. The people around us don't particularly need more programs and more ways to be busy, and they certainly don't need judgement for being unable to handle problems that come out of this time of discontinuous change. The church universal is bent to almost breaking by the pressures of trying to meet 21st century problems with 20th century (and older) methods.

The good news, though—and there is good news for us, as always—is that we have the answer in front of us, in the gospels that tell us of a man who was also God, who brought the love and healing power of God to a broken and hurting world. We can look to this man and his ministry on earth—his healing of the sick, his driving out of demons, his turning on its head the expectations of the society of the day, his compassion—to show us what to do. When do this by reading the scriptures and meditating on them and talking about them—a process called discernment—which we will be going through in different ways and different venues including during worship and Wednesday night studies and session meetings. And as we make our way through this time of discontinuous change we can learn how to minister to the people around us who also are overwhelmed and confused by life today, helping them to find hope and peace in an ever changing world. Amen.