

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today in our Gospel lesson we are in a sense encouraged by this healing act of Jesus to think outside of the box...but when doing so, some may accuse us of not obeying the commandments. However, there are those who do everything by the book, and I guess this Gospel may be a bit disconcerting...but those who are uncomfortable with Jesus breaking the law will more than likely overlook this because Jesus is doing it and we know the intentions of Jesus and we know that he is doing good.

We can excuse good intentions from the law...that is until someone else does it. When someone else breaks the law, our judgment is justified...the law says what it says. Yes, the law says what it says, and today it says that Jesus is breaking the law. So...we can say that this woman in our Gospel lesson today is not the only one who is not “upright”? Wouldn’t Jesus then be considered as one who is NOT upright?

We’ve come to a moment in scripture where we need to talk about the intention of the commandments, the meaning of the commandments, and how we are being taught to obey the commandments.

We generally say that an upright person, according to a Google search, is someone characterized by strong moral principles, honesty, and integrity, leading to ethically sound and righteous behavior. This means they are truthful, just, and fair in their actions and dealings, reflecting a steadfast commitment to high moral standards. The term is often associated with a deep sense of morality, virtue, and blamelessness, making them respected and considered honorable.¹ Well then...I guess Jesus could fit into this definition, but there again too, he just broken the law...didn’t he? Or did he?

Of course, we know this definition of an upright person to be a metaphorical interpretation, but that’s not what is said about this woman as I read the commentaries and research for this Gospel passage before us today. Some say that this woman with a spirit that has crippled her for eighteen years has done something or is sinful to deserve her ailment.

When looking at a lesson like this, there is always a danger in both overreading and underreading. For generations this passage has suffered from underreading as I am to understand one commentator’s reflections on this passage. And when one researches this text, one finds out quickly that there are many assumptions about this woman. Listen to what the text actually says:

¹¹ And just then there appeared (*in the synagogue*) a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

This interpretation is also very close to the Greek. However, all we know about this woman is that she is bent over and crippled and has been this way for eighteen years. Oh, but how we love to fill in the blanks with our righteousness by assuming that God through Jesus Christ has just saved her life and made her “an upright person,”...morally and physically. All the Gospel says is that she was in the synagogue, “set free from her ailment.”

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=meaning+of+an+upright+person>

But this is where we assume things about this woman and shade the tone of the story with our assumed sense of faith and our assumed righteousness just as we push our faith and righteousness off on others less fortunate. It's like saying, let's go gather some homeless people off the street and bring them to our church...this will be good for them. This is what I literally experienced in a church Sunday School class of adults some years ago. Would it really be good for the homeless if we did this, or would it be better for us to prove our assumed righteousness by imposing our so-called faith on others and not in a helpful way.

Perhaps it would serve us all well to listen closely to the words of Isaiah as the prophet encourages us to remove the yoke of pointing our fingers and the speaking of evil...or we could say by pointing our faith and judgment at unassuming people. We all know our Eighth Commandment...and as you run through the commandments in your mind just like you sing the alphabet song in your head when alphabetizing things, the eight commandment is "You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor." When reading this Gospel passage we bear false witness of this woman by assuming that her inability to stand upright has to do with her moral standing as well.

When looking at the Eighth Commandment, I love how Luther defines this commandment but I know too that I do not abide as I ought...by it. Luther explains it this way:

"Bearing false witness" is nothing but a work of the tongue. God wants to hold in check whatever is done with the tongue against a neighbor.

Of this much could be said. It is a common, pernicious plague that everyone would rather hear evil than good about their neighbors. Even though we ourselves are evil, we cannot tolerate it when anyone speaks evil of us; instead, we want to hear the whole world say golden things of us. Yet we cannot bear it when someone says the best things about others.

Luther goes on to say:

There is a very great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. You may certainly know about a sin, but you should not judge it. I may certainly see and hear that my neighbor sins, but I have no command to tell others about it.

If I were to interfere and pass judgment on my neighbor, I would fall into a sin greater than that of my neighbor. When you become aware of a sin, however, do nothing but turn your ears into a tomb and bury it.²

Yeah...now try that on for size! Just when we think we got this righteous thing all figured out we dig a little deeper and find we are not even close. Nonetheless, through the eyes of our very own brokenness we look at this woman today in our Gospel lesson and assume so much. We falsely judge her because of her posture and assume the worst about her...and we also assume so much contrary to who she really is. We may even look at her with sympathy rather than looking at her with the kind of joy we often take in noticing someone who is not bent over and unable to stand upright.

There are moral assumptions about this woman...but she does not ask to be healed or touched by Jesus, she is just attending the synagogue, she's not on the street, she's in church. Nonetheless,

² Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. "The Large Catechism" The Eighth Commandment, par 263-266, page 421.

she is healed...just as each of us are healed by Jesus...and she is healed on the Sabbath and according to the Pharisees that breaks the Third Commandment...or does it?

From the Book of Exodus we hear this from God about the Third Commandment that says we are to hallow the day of rest:

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Luther basically says the same thing in his Catechisms, but he says this in the Large Catechism about the Third Commandment:

Nature teaches and demands that the common people—menservants and maidservants who have gone about their work or trade all week long—should also retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. Second and most important, we observe them so that people will have time and opportunity on such days of rest, which otherwise would not be available, to attend worship services, that is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God.³

When we look at the dynamic of what is happening in this Gospel lesson before us today we need to make a distinction between the *words* of the commandments versus the *intention* of the commandments. The issue here is not whether to obey the commandment. Rather the issue is *how* to obey the commandment.⁴

The defining “WORD” of the Third Commandment is liberation and Jesus is that word that liberates us all and shows us all how to obey the commandment. The Sabbath is a day of liberation. In other words, the Sabbath interrupts us who are believers...interrupts our cycle of work...it intrudes into our work cycle with a day of rest that liberates us from that cycle. Likewise, Jesus is liberating this woman...who is a Daughter of Abraham...a woman who is a believer...Jesus is liberating her from the work and the difficulty of being bent over and crippled for eighteen years. Jesus knows this and authoritatively teaches that the purpose of the Third Commandment is that there shall be rest and freedom from our work and a time to praise God in worship on the Sabbath. On at least one day out of seven, we should have the freedom to listen to God, to commune with God, and to praise God. That is exactly what this woman is doing.

On this Sabbath day she is liberated and she praises God. But to get to that point she needed to be liberated from what she faced day in and day out, and so Jesus does this.⁵ Jesus explains himself to the ruler of the synagogue, saying: ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be (loosed, set free, released...liberated) from this bond on the

³ Ibid. Pages 397, par 84.

⁴ A point nicely made by Barbara E. Reid in her commentary on Luke 13:10-17, in *The Lectionary Commentary: The Third Readings* (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001).

⁵ This term “liberation” and the how to obey the commandment is “borrowed” from the Reverend Gregory P. Fryer, pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY from his sermon preparation on 8/21/2019 for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 16C along with *Sermon Brainwave Podcast 1038*: Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost - August 24, 2025.

sabbath day?” (Luke 13:16) If an ox or a donkey can be led from its stable to water so that it can get a drink, so can this woman be set free...or liberated from her infirmity so that she can praise God. That is what the Sabbath commandment is about— that we should be liberated from the debilitating challenges and chores of our everyday life that weighs us down and cripples us and we see Jesus enabling us to rest and refresh so that we may also assemble to hear and discuss God’s Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God.

This woman in our Gospel lesson today walked bent over for eighteen years. I can say I know the pain she must have experienced when walking in such a manner, but I cannot assume that nor do I assume anything else about her. She is liberated from her ailment and stands up straight and praises God. For us today listening to this Gospel, she is a symbol of our poor human race, bent over and burdened with sorrows and setbacks. But we are not made to stand straight by pointing out the sins of others or assuming things about others, nor are we made to stand straight by making others obey the commandments. Rather the Good News for us today is the WORD, Jesus Christ liberates us all from the burdens of this world and shows us all *how* to obey and live out the commandments.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.