

Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath when a synagogue leader tried to shame him by pointing out that the healing was work - something that could be done on any of the six days set aside for labour instead of the holy Sabbath. Jesus responds, like his accuser, to the crowd by pointing out that any of them would take care of an animal needing help on the Sabbath - so how much more should they respond to a human being in need. All this kind of argument is well and good and very Jewish. But the synagogue leader *and* Jesus are actually saying more here. The synagogue leader uses the Greek verb *dei* to make his claim about the *ought* of work. Luke loves this verb in his narrative because it describes what it is *necessary* for Jesus to do as God's agent. Jesus' response picks up on the synagogue leader's claim. The ought here is not about a divine necessity to work on the other six days, but based on a divine necessity (*dei*) to have this woman be freed from *bondage on the Sabbath* (Luke 13:16). To make the point even clearer, he calls her what she really is a "daughter of Abraham." (David Schnasa Jacobsen)

The "Sabbath way of life" is a foundational element of the whole Jubilee system of justice and equity that God gave to Israel. In healing this crippled woman on the Sabbath, and teaching that mercy is a Sabbath-activity, Jesus embodies the justice, grace and welcome of God's unshakeable kingdom. The theme, then, this week could be titled "God's Sabbath Kingdom".

(John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

COCU 53C

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah's book begins by describing how God called him to be a prophet to Judah, beginning 40 years of faithful if reluctant service (627–587 BC), and also 40 years of deeply personal struggle for the "weeping prophet." Jeremiah responded to God's call with protests of personal inadequacies. His sense of inadequacy didn't derive from petty problems overcome by cheerful determination, from false modesty, nor was it a mere rhetorical device used by the writer. Jeremiah struggled with God's call on his life, with a sense of failure, with virulent opposition from critics, and with deep discouragement. God gave Jeremiah something more than just an exhortation about perseverance. He promised his divine presence. "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. So do not be afraid, for I am with you.*" Believing this promise required the audacity to believe that the Sender knew who he was sending. That his message lived independent of the messenger. That his presence gave perspective to his problems. Jeremiah learned to acknowledge rather than to deny or even to overcome his many inadequacies.

In Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2005, the narrator-pastor John Ames ponders a lifetime of listening for God's call. He reflects upon his accumulation of life experiences and how they wove a rich tapestry whose beautiful texture could only result from many different strands - darkness and disappointment, frailty and failure, memory and mystery, regret and reconciliation, and, weaving it all together, sheer gratitude and joy at how remarkably beautiful the resulting garment of his life still was. In the end, Robinson's pastor had come to trusted God's words to Jeremiah: "*Don't be afraid, for I am with you. I have called you by name and appointed YOU.*" (Daniel B. Clendenin)

Psalm 71: 1-6

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.

**In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.**

Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you.

A Personal Meditation by Joan Stott

The age-old question that is asked of most children at some stage in their early years is: *"What do you want to be when you grow up?"* If the child is a boy, the answer used to be *"a fireman"*; *"a policeman"*; or even a *"train-driver"*. The girls used to want to be *"a hairdresser"*; *"a nurse"*. How the times have changed, as *"macho"* and *"feminine"* ambitions! Children these days will eventually be using skills not yet developed or careers not yet imagined! But, I believe that the question has not been appropriately answered by listening carers! The real question is, what do people eventually want to *"be"* or *"become"* before their life's end? Perhaps people would like to discover the mystery of their own potential and who their own *"self"* was and is, from the time they were born up to their present age - whilst pondering life's meaning.

Reflection: *Are we really seeking to discover the mystery of our own self?*

The Psalmist sang: *"...Be to me a protecting rock of safety, where I am always welcome....."* I believe that the Psalmist was trying to understand more about God's being and nature! He begged God for security, even whilst being fully aware of God's continued protection and gave grateful thanks for it all! He knew from his own experience the strength and power of God's protecting arm; he also knew the hope that God offered to all who placed their trust in God; and above all, he knew of God's life-long care over him! All these acknowledgements are there in the psalm. Regardless of our faith in God, fear and anxiety makes all of us feel very vulnerable, and this man was not only old, but vulnerable and scared! Later in the psalm, he begged God not to abandon him - even as he sang God's praises. His positive attitude to life returned and he sang to God: *"...you will restore me to life again and lift me up... You have done such wonderful things. Who can compare with you, O God?... because you are faithful to your promises, O God.... I will shout for joy and sing your praises.."*

Reflection: *Fear and anxiety makes all of us feel vulnerable!*

Hebrews 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 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.

Our lesson from Hebrews for today recounts the story of the people of Israel at Sinai. It was an experience that was terrifying for them; even Moses was afraid! And the voice that came to them was a voice of warning: "Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death." (Exodus 19:12). The gist of the message was clear - don't you dare try to get close to God, or you will die. But the apostle to the Hebrews encourages his audience to do just that - to draw near to God - on another mountain, Zion, the place where God's promises of salvation are realized. The apostle to the Hebrews encourages some "selective listening" on the part of Christians who need help holding onto their faith. He doesn't want them to take the warnings at Sinai as the "final word" about God's demeanour toward them. He doesn't want them to run away for fear that if they get too close to God, they will die. Rather he wants them to draw near to God through Jesus Christ. (Alan Brehm)