



21st August 2022 | 11th Sunday in Pentecost Growth

Message Transcript

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and give thanks to God and celebrate the 11th Sunday after Pentecost. I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our three readings today have another great message for us about true worship of our Lord. Let's start with our Gospel reading from Luke, the beloved physician, and the situation in a synagogue.

What a stickler for the Law the leader of the synagogue must have been, and does he know what he sounds like?

Have we ever met people like this leader in our lives?

As we read these passages, one can feel the silence of the synagogue worshipers as the religious leader tries to 'whip up angst' among them that what they have seen is wrong and an affront to God.

The leader keeps saying to one person after another, '*Surely you can see that there are other days for healings?*' And he keeps waiting for the expected nods of support, for expressions of condemnation against Jesus. But the comments don't come!! The crowd know what they have seen.

Those worshipers at that synagogue have seen that women coming to worship, shuffling painfully to do her duty, bent over as she is. Maybe they know her well, as a regular visitor to this meeting, those details aren't important.

The worshipers have also seen Jesus spotting the woman, something that, apparently, the regular leaders have failed to do for years. They know that what

happens is entirely at Jesus' initiative. There is no indication that the woman has come looking for Jesus or for healing. It is Jesus who calls her, not the other way around.

They hear Jesus' words. There is no magic, no incantation, Jesus doesn't even talk of healing. Instead, what Jesus says is, *'you are free.'*

The worshipers see her straighten up as though he has literally freed her, lifting a great weight off her back, or undoing chains that have kept her bent over.

And look at the women's response is instant. Luke relates that she doesn't waste time in stretching her cramped limbs, or patting her straightened back. *She bursts out into praise of God.*

The Jews in that synagogue know with utter clarity what they have seen, that is the presence of God. The presence of God, there in the synagogue, freely offered to an utterly unimportant woman. It gives all of them hope, and it teaches us the readers something!

Perhaps worship is not a matter of rules laid down and interpreted by someone else, but is more like the praise pouring out of the women.

Perhaps this is what the Sabbath is really about, worship and freedom, not endless worry about whether you've broken some obscure rule without knowing it!

Little wonder the synagogue leader gets no response when he tries to whip up the crowd against Jesus. He can hardly deny the logic of Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath, but he hates it.

Why? Because it implies that every single little person in the crowd is of vital importance to God and, if that is the case, then where's the prestige in being a leader?

These rejoicing Jewish worshipers are a mockery of all his years of leadership, carefully training them in dependence.

If the Sabbath is to be a day when God's people freely praise him, then half his job, interpreting the Sabbath regulations, is gone.

It's not as though Jesus' teaching about the Sabbath is so wholly unprecedented. Isaiah said some of the same things.

In today's reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, it is clear that the point of the Sabbath is to change your daily focus. Without a day on which you remember what you are for, and who your God is, you can just be in the habit of thinking only of yourself and your own needs.

In today's verses from our Old Testament reading, Isaiah sees the Sabbath as a day that turns you back to God and so away from yourself and towards others. It's a day that keeps on bringing the community back to themselves and their real purpose.

And we can say Amen to what a purpose that is. They are to, as Isaiah 58.14 says ¹⁴ *then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;*

That desire that the leader of the synagogue has to "down play" the Sabbath, to make it something smaller and more controllable is not unknown in Christian circles. Not that "down play" is exactly the word you would use about the Hebrew' description of what is being rejected. But clearly the Jewish readers have had a tendency to speak of their encounter with God in terms that are too easily imagined,

even if they are meant to be giving weight to the terrifying holiness of God. They like to imagine themselves cringing in darkness, not worthy to approach God. However, the author of the letter to the Hebrews wants to see believers, that's us, stepping out with a confidence into the light of God's city, where they are known and expected, and where the beloved figure of Jesus is waiting for them. And in case we start to turn this glorious picture into yet another way of keeping God at a distance, Hebrews 12.18 – 29 reminds them, and us, that this confidence is based on their/our knowledge of God. In the plain daylight of their/us meeting with Jesus, they/we can see with total clarity the awesome, loving, wild fire of God love, one that *fills our hearts, and kindles in them the fire of His love.*
Amen