

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

You might be surprised to know there are some odd laws still on the books around our country.

In Michigan, wives aren't allowed to cut their hair without their husband's permission.

In California, women are banned from driving while wearing a housecoat.

Profanity is forbidden at funeral homes in Georgia.

In Arizona, it is illegal for donkeys to sleep in bathtubs.

In Baltimore, Maryland, it is illegal to take a lion to the movies.

In California, it is a misdemeanor to shoot at any kind of game from a moving vehicle, unless the

target is a whale.

In Zion, Illinois it is illegal for anyone to give cats, dogs, or other domesticated animals a lighted

cigar.

In Georgia, it is illegal to keep an ice cream cone in your back pocket on a Sunday.

And there are more, just go to the internet to find them. There must have been a reason for those laws originally, but they seem a bit odd today. But then again, there are laws that protect and guide us

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus runs into one of those old laws. He heals a woman on the Sabbath, and is immediately taken to task by the leader of the synagogue, who instructs him and 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."

Our first response at this, is to wonder how anyone could be so stupid, so legalistic when a life is restored. This woman has been stooped over—unable to stand up straight—for eighteen years. For most of her adult life, she has been bent over—unable to look people in the eye. Her posture prevented her from breathing properly. It stopped her from getting the exercise that she needed. It would almost certainly doom her to an early death.

But having encountered Jesus for just a moment, this woman was suddenly freed from her infirmity. Suddenly she could stand straight—look Jesus in the eye—breathe properly—walk, and run. Hallelujah! Everything that had been wrong for eighteen years was finally right. It was like being freed from prison.

And you can be sure that the village was overjoyed to see what had happened. They knew what it was like to endure hardship, and they were thrilled to see this woman freed from the prison of her infirmity. But the synagogue leader—a religious man who presumably cared about people—had only this to say: "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day."

When Jesus cured this woman and she stood up straight for the first time in eighteen years, she was delighted -- and she began praising God. How could anyone find fault with that? But the synagogue leader could only say: “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath Day.”

Talk about a stick in the mud—If there were ever someone who failed to “get it”, it was this synagogue leader. The woman was thrilled at her new found freedom. The crowd shared her joy. But this synagogue leader could only say: “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 let’s look at this synagogue leader. The first thing in the synagogue’s favor is that the Third Commandment prohibits work on the Sabbath. It says, Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six day the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. That’s clear enough, isn’t it?

Second, there wasn’t any reason why Jesus couldn’t heal this woman the next day. Sabbath regulations meant that he couldn’t travel, so he would still be in town. The woman wasn’t going anywhere. She had put up with her infirmity for eighteen years. There was no reason why she couldn’t tough it out for one more day.

Third, the synagogue leader was responsible for making sure the people in his town observed the law. He had a job to do, and he was trying to do it.

And fourth, to observe the law was to honor God. As nearly as the synagogue leader could tell, Jesus was deliberately violating the law—and quite unnecessarily at that—and was therefore guilty of dishonoring the Sabbath—and dishonoring God.

But he was wrong. Jesus made that abundantly clear. Jesus 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 this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?

In other words, if God’s law allows you to take care of livestock, doesn’t it allow us to take care of people as well? And isn’t it OK to free this woman from Satan’s bondage on the Sabbath? Isn’t it OK to defeat Satan on the Sabbath? Isn’t it OK to show a little Godly compassion on the Sabbath?

Luke concludes the story by saying: When Jesus said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that Jesus was doing. You can be sure that many of the members of that crowd had felt the lash of

that synagogue leader's sharp tongue at some point in their lives. I'm sure that they all felt like cheering when Jesus put the synagogue leader in his place.

So what does this story have to do with us? For one thing, it shows us that it isn't always easy to know what the right thing to do is. There are lots of people who go around today acting as if they have all the answers. We like to think that these religious know-it-alls are the right wing conservatives. However, left-wing liberals can be just as doctrinaire and uncharitable as any right wing conservative. People at both ends of the continuum like to pronounce themselves right and everyone else wrong.

There's a little saying to help us keep our priorities straight. That little saying is this: "People are more important than programs." That was what the synagogue leader needed—someone to tell him that he needed to interpret the law with a bit more charity,--a bit more grace. In another setting, Jesus put it this way. He said: "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath."

What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy? Martin Luther said, it means "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God's Word or preaching, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it." Christians today tend to treat the matter of holy observance casually. For most Christians, such observance involves, at best, an hour of public worship each week. Outside that hour, we feel free to engage in work, recreation, and shopping. We would do well to recover a sense of holy time—time to honor God. Being set free from the law does not free us from responsibility. If the ruler of the synagogue erred by being too legalistic about the Sabbath, we are more likely to err by being too casual about the ways and times that we honor God.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!" It might be an old law, but it's still a good one. However, Jesus summed up all the laws by saying, "Love God, and love your neighbors as yourselves. Amen."