

Luke 13: 10-17; Isaiah 61:1-2; “The Purpose of the Sabbath” I. The Binding brought by Sin II. The Loosing brought by Jesus

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we consider the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath.

Earlier in Luke 6, Jesus taught that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. So the concept of the Sabbath Day has been already addressed by Jesus. But in Luke 6 the focus was on the relationship of Christ to the Sabbath. How He viewed Himself and the Day of Rest. In calling Himself the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus was making it clear that He was over- greater than the Sabbath. He was the ruler and master of this day. The Sabbath was always designed to be a blessing- a gift to mankind to remind us who we are and to point us to something greater. However, man takes the gifts of God and turns them into idols- bringing slavery and bondage where Jesus would have freedom and deliverance. A few weeks back I asked the HS catechism class- what kind of things should we do on Sunday? What is the proper way to view and use this day? How can we preserve the fact that Sunday is designed to be a day of joy, gladness and worship? Jesus Himself said- man was not made for the Sabbath- but the Sabbath was made for man. So today we find that Jesus reveals the proper purpose of the Sabbath as He heals the disabled woman.

### **I. The Binding brought by Sin**

Our text begins as we find Jesus teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath day. As you recall, the Pharisees had expanded the laws to such a degree that there was a law for every aspect of this day- what you could and could not do. For example, you could draw water out of well for your animal to drink- but you could not hold the bucket while your animal drank as that would be carrying a burden. If a wall fell on someone, he could only be dug out if his life was in danger- otherwise he was to be left under the rubble until the next day! Well, Jesus is standing there on the Sabbath again- teaching the crowds about the love, mercy and grace of God as He sees a woman with a disabling spirit. Now remember as we learned from last week, this woman was not disabled because of any individual sin- it was not her actions that had brought about this physical ailment- but we also know that sin in general is the reason that there are disabilities present in our world. As our text develops, we

find that she has a disabling spirit; in fact, Jesus says in v. 16 that she is bound by Satan. An evil spirit had fallen upon her- so that her spine remained constantly curved. She was unable to stand upright- she was bent over and hunched. Bound like an animal tied to its pen. She had suffered this way for over 18 years- imagine it! 18 years of walking while you are forced to look down- unable to bend up and always in pain. What we take for granted was not enjoyed by her- she could not carry on with life as normal. But this bondage is not the only binding that we see. In fact as we come to v. 14, we find the binding that the Pharisees are putting on the crowd. This is evident in the words of the Synagogue leader. Seeing this woman healed moved him to anger- he was indignant- blinded with rage so that he could no longer think! He embodies the spirit of the Pharisees. Repeatedly, the Pharisees were so angry- because Jesus had healed someone on the Sabbath! They were cold hearted- having no mercy! They bound the people with heavy burdens- list of things you could not do! They had more care for an animal in the barn than this daughter of Abraham. Their human law was broken- and they have no room for grace! Note that they ignored the fact that this woman had just stood up straight for the first time in 18 years- instead of praising God and marveling he starts to chasten the crowds! Don't get any ideas- the Sabbath laws still stand! He- and the Pharisees as a whole- had little concern for the oppressed- because they were the ones oppressing! The heavy yoke would not be lifted- because they were the ones putting the yoke on the people's shoulders! They forget that God loves mercy- that the heart of the Law is love! If you would do something for an animal on the Sabbath, why wouldn't you do it for fellow man?

The fact is, Satan loathes anything that looks like joy, freedom and peace. Even as Legalism says, do not touch, do not taste, do not eat or handle. Do not enjoy the blessings of God- do not enjoy Sabbath rest! The heart of man is set on piling up more and more rules, with no room for freedom and joyful obedience from the heart! More laws that will not touch the heart! Sin brings bondage, slavery, legalism and deceit! The increase of meaningless laws of man and their foolish thinking. Laws which grow out of a hypocritical heart! We see that our fellow man has more concern for animals than fellow image bearers. They save the puppies and the sea turtles, but have no problem killing infants! Hypocrite! But we do the same thing when we turn Sunday into a

burden. When we fail to observe this festive day with joy and gladness! How easy it is to increase rules- to have our own ideas of what can and cannot be done on Sunday. We have a strict observance so that we don't work- but we lack mercy in regards to others! We take pride in our own religion- we are full of self congratulations- while we think little of those in need and pay no regard for the lost! Beware the hypocritical spirit that puts laws before people, and lists before mercy! The hypercritical and judgmental heart knows little about the freeing- loosing work of Jesus Christ!

## **II. The Loosing brought by Jesus**

Well, in seeing Jesus perform this miracle the ruler of the synagogue stands up and rebukes the crowd for being caught up in the emotion. There are six days to be healed as he says in v. 14. Come back then- and don't look for healing on the Sabbath. Well, Jesus is going to expose this false teaching by revealing the proper meaning and purpose of Sabbath. An aged pastor once told me, if we filled Sunday with the things that we should be doing, we would not be asking question about what we can not do! Well- what does Jesus reveal about His own heart and the heart of the Sabbath? What should a Christian pursue when it comes to the Lord's Day observance? Well, the first thing that we find Jesus willing to do is to teach. His pattern of entering the synagogue to preach is one that stands as v. 10 illustrates. He came, as Isaiah said- to preach the good news to the poor- but He also came to proclaim liberty to the captives. So upon seeing this woman in v. 12, He in mercy frees her. The next thing Jesus pursues on the Sabbath is the healing of the sick. Multiple times in the gospels- as Mt. 12 confirms- Jesus healed on the Sabbath. This healing was a loosing! The theme found in v. 15 and 16 is the losing of bonds- the breaking of chains. That the prisoner would be set free. As Jesus sees it, this poor girl was bound and chained to this disease- by Satan's hand; and it was Jesus' delight to break the chain and set her free! Indeed- Jesus came to set the captive prisoner free! As we read in Isaiah 61 it was for this very reason that He had come! To heal, to preach the gospel, and to set the prisoner free- to loosen those caught in the bonds of sin! The opening of prisons and liberty! Jesus has such mercy and compassion upon the poor and sick- and this mercy and compassion is not hindered by the day of the week! Although you and I cannot

physically heal the sick, we should share Jesus care and concern for the suffering- even seeking to minister to then as possible. The works of mercy are a fitting- even a praised work of the church! It is a privilege to visit the distressed- to pray for the afflicted and to comfort the discouraged with the Word of God! Satan does not stop his affliction just because it is Sunday- so the church has ample opportunities to be blessing and to bring the healing hand of Jesus to bear! As James 1:27 says, Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this, to visit orphans and widow in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. One of the things that our deacons can do is to draw our attention to- and steward our funds towards the places of need! The church is a place of restoration and peace- because it is the place where Jesus dwells with His people. Perhaps we should ask- how can I help- how can I be a blessing to the oppressed today? The heart of the Sabbath is the freedom, liberty and joy that Jesus gives! The appropriate response of a Christian when we see so much suffering and affliction must be compassion! Instead of thinking- they deserve it- we should be thinking- how can we help? When we see suffering as something that Jesus has the power to deal with- we will be one step close to seeing how we are uniquely equipped to help! So the ministry of mercy- the works and words of compassion and grace- is the first aspect of acceptable worship we find in our passage! But there is one more- a fitting response to Jesus work on the Sabbath is one of praising God! Jesus pronounces the words of healing- letting her know that her bonds are broken. But there is a deeper bondage that Jesus came to deal with as well. Listen to Gal. 5- for freedom Christ has set us free, so do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. We could say that Jesus has loosed us from our sins- setting us free from slavery and the bonds that Satan has placed on us. It is the deliverance that the loosing of the woman points to! And the fact is, those who are set free by Jesus are free indeed! And once Jesus sets you free, your life changes. This woman in v. 13 starts immediately praising God- giving glory to Him that her bondage is over and her warfare has ceased! When Jesus makes straight what was once crooked- taking off a heavy yoke- or as Is. 61 put it- when He proclaims the gospel of peace and the year of the Lord's favor- how can we help but praise His name! The meaning and purpose of the Sabbath day then- and the Lord's Day today- is to praise and worship our God because of all that

Jesus has said and done! The ministry of the Word deals with the spiritual bondage that we are all born into- echoing the teaching of Jesus! As Jesus did- so ministers are called to proclaim liberty to the captives and to declare the year of God's peace and favor! In order to get to the heart of the Sabbath- we need to identify what was missing from this Synagogue leader. Submission, mercy and praise are missing! For us, Sunday should be both a day of rest and work! Christ has set us free to set aside our toiling labor to remind us who we are- how we are set free- and our calling to worship and serve! Works of worship and mercy should never be far from our mind on this festive day! Are we remembering the distressed- praying for them and comforting them as able? Are we consistent in our praise as we think of the deliverance that we have received in Christ! Jesus brings both physical and spiritual liberty. Both aspects should be in our mind this day! This day was never meant to be bad news but good news! Jesus Christ has set us free! Free to worship and free to serve! This is how the Synod of Dort summarizes the Lord's Day: "This day must be so consecrated unto the service of God that upon it men rest from all servile labors, except those required by charity and present necessities, and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the service of God." As Christians, there is a direct link between how we see God's love and mercy upon us and how we display that love and mercy to others.

To conclude, Sabbath rest was never meant to be inactivity or to be an excuse to overlook others! This ruler's heart was cold as he calculated the legal ramification of this gracious act. His heart had no place for mercy and praise as he became annoyed by the liberating action of Jesus! In Jesus, we too can find rest for our weary souls and bodies! Come you who are weary and heavy laden- I will give you rest! Come, eat bread and drink wine without cost! Be fed and nourished unto eternal life! For my body is true food and my blood true drink! In my sacrifice you will find forgiveness for all your sins! We are all bent over in our sins- needing to be set free by His gracious word! Let our hearts never be uncaring and legalistic- but rather compassionate, joyful and gracious! Yes, rest from sweat filled labor is a part of our Sunday. But also reflecting on the meaning and purpose of Jesus ministry here revealed- and how we can share this with others! When we fill our Sabbath with the things we should be doing, we will have little time to come up with lists of things that should not!