**21st August 2022**

**Call to worship**

As we come to worship,
let us think about what it means to be free.
As we come to worship,
let us remember what it feels like when people see our needs.
As we come to worship,
let us consider how we can respond to the needs of those around us.

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God,
open our eyes, open our ears,
open our hearts to the needs around us.
Help us to see people who are hidden in the margins.
Help us to hear those who find it hard to have a voice.
Help us to feel the pain of people who feel trapped by their circumstances.
Give us a vision for a renewed community.
Help us to model good listening and caring.
Give us wisdom, passion and energy to do your work here
where we live and see people transformed and set free.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Praise the Lord, my soul; praise the Lord.
All my being, praise God’s holy name.
God forgives, God heals and makes whole.
God blesses us with love and mercy.
We praise the Lord as we come to worship.
Praise the Lord, my soul; praise the Lord.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we can never see you in all your fullness,
all your glory, all your majesty.
Your greatness is beyond our understanding,
your deeds beyond our imagining,
your love beyond our deepest yearning.
You are the God we adore – certain, secure and sure.
You are God from one generation to the next,
not waning or changing, but forever our God.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

O God, all people are part of your created order, all are worthy
of love and respect, care and attention, justice and equality.
Forgive us if our prejudice excludes people.
Forgive us if our views are entrenched and misguided.
Forgive us if we fail to see people as equals.
Forgive us if in our zeal to worship we exclude so many.
Forgive us for our excuses that stop us responding to the needs
of others – and to your command to love as you love us.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

We do not understand how you can forgive us again and again,
Lord, yet we have again confessed our failings, our shortcoming,
our wrongdoings, our sins – and your promise still stands:
‘My child, go in peace, your sins are forgiven.’
So, let us go and serve the Lord.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

We are so thankful, Lord, that you see us for what we are, for
who we are and where we are. You know us by name, you know
us through and through. Ashamed of ourselves as we are at
times, we are thankful that you stick with us, persevere with us,
encourage our good intentions and forgive our failings.
We are thankful for all the help, support and guidance we have
been given. We are thankful that people throughout our lives
have introduced us to you, to your ways, to your love, to your
power and glory. We are thankful that, in your name, people
have noticed us and picked us up and guided us. We are thankful
that you have led others to lead us and reach out to us. We
are thankful for a rich history recorded in the Bible, stories of
prophets, priests and kings, stories of love, help and healing.
We give you thanks and praise, Lord God, for all the ways that,
and all the people through whom, you are revealed to us.
**Amen.**

**Mime Luke 13.10-17**

For this presentation, you will need a narrator and three actors to mime the story: Jesus (who stands at the front of the space); old woman (positioned at the back, and hunched over so that no one notices her...at first); synagogue leader (to one side, but near the front – to demonstrate importance!). Ask the actors to mime the story as it is told. When the woman is healed and stands up, both she and Jesus raise their arms in praise, making themselves very obvious. The leader of the synagogue, standing with hands on hips, then points accusingly at Jesus. It may be helpful to rehearse this in advance.

**Sabbath? What are your traditions/rules?**

When Jesus encounters a crippled woman in the synagogue he heals her. However, it was a sabbath and some in the synagogue didn’t like it. Jesus accused them of hypocrisy: they would happily care for their animals, so why do they object to him caring for this woman?

Sabbath was prescribed in the Ten Commandments: the 4th Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **9**Six days you shall labour and do all your work, **10**but 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. **11**For 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.

Sabbath was sunset on Friday night to sunset on Saturday evening. Certain things you can and cant do designated as work.

A Shabbat elevator is an elevator which works in a special mode, operating automatically, to satisfy the Jewish law requiring Jews to abstain from operating electrical switches on Shabbat (the Sabbath). These are also known as Sabbath or Shabbos elevators.following a restriction that comes from a prohibition against creating sparks and fires. When enabled, elevators with this mode will typically proceed from the lowest landing directly to the top landing, and then stop automatically at every floor on the way down. This allows passengers to step on and off without having to press any buttons. This prevents violation of the Sabbath prohibition against operating electrical devices when Sabbath is in effect for those who observe this ritual.

Early Christians changed the Sabbath to Sunday – in recognition of the earth shattering and world changing event of the resurrection of Jesus. So powerful they changed their holy day.

How do we recognise the Sabbath? Any traditions or general rules we observe?

**Bible Reading Luke 13.10-17**

Commentary and questions

Luke tells us that this discourse is happening on a sabbath – which charges the scene with even more significance – and in or around a synagogue (v.10). We don’t know when Jesus arrived at the synagogue, but Luke’s reason for telling us now is to heighten the tension as the episode that began in 12.1 rushes to its climax.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In the synagogue is a woman who has been bent double for 18 years. Jesus calls her over and sets her free. Here is good news to the poor (a woman), the bringing of ‘release’ (cf 4.18f), the plundering of Satan’s kingdom (v.16, cf 11.14ff). Satan was the code name for the adversary or enemy against God’s good intentions for the world, and also the accuser of those who have faith. This is the yeast of the kingdom unleashed into the heartland of the yeast of the Pharisees – i.e. the synagogue (which might explain why Luke has left it until now to tell us that Jesus is teaching in the synagogue). Jesus’ action in removing the yoke from the woman on the sabbath and in the synagogue echoes Isaiah’s call in chapter 58: God’s people celebrate their faith by acting justly in the world, especially to the least and the last.

The woman’s disability has sometimes been thought by commentators as having a psychological cause: Maybe someone had persistently abused her, verbally or physically, when she was smaller, until her twisted emotions communicated themselves into her body and she found she couldn’t get straight. Even after all the medical advances of the last few hundred years we are very much aware that such things happen without any other apparent cause.

Needless to say, the synagogue leader, a Pharisee, explodes with indignation. There is no need to heal on the sabbath; Jesus could have done this any other day of the week – it was hardly an emergency! Such a reaction is an example of the yeast Jesus has warned about - the bad influence of law obsessed perfectionists called the Pharisees(cf 12.1,56). The Pharisees, despite their nit-picking sabbath observance, have not lifted a finger to help this woman in 18 years – but they have led their animals to water, even on every sabbath.

This woman is just as much a part of God’s people as the Pharisees (i.e. ‘daughter of Abraham’, v.16a). Doesn’t she deserve to be ‘untied’ on the sabbath just as much, if not more, than a thirsty animal? For isn’t the sabbath a reminder of being set free from slavery in Egypt? So why are the Pharisees trying to make it a symbol of bondage (see also 11.46,52)?

The crowd – having been ambivalent about Jesus, even borderline hostile at the end of chapter 12 –is now, for a few brief moments, persuaded and united in praise at what he’d said and done.

***What questions or thoughts does the passage arouse for you?***

**Setting us free**

**Is there bondage from which we need to be set free? (Luke 13.16)**

Did you feel that the restrictions imposed on our lives because of Covid-19 were a form of bondage from which you wanted to be free? Or did you welcome the fact that little was expected of you? Do you welcome the ‘new normal’ in which we are now living? Or is that a different sort of bondage?[[2]](#endnote-2)

The synagogue leader in today’s gospel story could not grasp the notion that the needs of the woman might take precedence over the traditions and rules of which he was a guardian. Can you imagine how your church might respond to the propounding of a radically different view from that usually heard there? Would your church respond well to the arrival of a group of Romany folk? Or even to the arrival of a group of people much younger than the usual congregation? Or of people who are visibly unfamiliar with how we do things? Exposure to a Christian culture in which it is [normal to stand for prayer and sit for hymns](http://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/how-we-worship/why-we-worship-this-way/standing-for-prayer/)could well be shocking. I do not forget the deep shock I felt when I went to a celebration of the greek Orthodox liturgy . Likewise a Pentecostal church that was loud and extrovert, people shouting out all the time, dacning waving their hands in the aoir praising God.

What are the aspects of our world view which may hold us in bondage, as individuals and as Christian communities? Might they include the style of our worship, whether we call it ‘free’ or ‘liturgical’ or something else? Might our expectations of visitors to our congregations make it difficult for us to see them as human beings with needs? Would we be happy to welcome people with radically different lifestyles? Or radically different attitudes to human sexuality? Many years ago someone whose lifestyle was somewhat unconventional told me how hard it had been to come back to church for the first time because of the attitudes she expected to encounter. Whilst ‘Sunday best’ is no longer so dominant in many congregations, do we still have expectations of the way visitors should dress or behave?

More generally, might the world view of the newspapers we read be preventing us from seeing things as others see them? If one follows the debates, in the world view of those contending for the leadership of the Conservative Party (and hence Prime Minister) climate change, Covid-19 and Brexit are all non-issues. But how biased are our starting points?

But what things about the way we normally think and act may get in the way of our response to people in need? There is evidence of negative ways in which many British churches responded to the arrival of people from the Windrush generation; are we quite sure that we would respond differently now?

Finally, some words:

If you see someone falling behind, walk beside them
If you see someone being ignored, find a way to include them.
Always remind people of their worth. One small act could mean the world to them.

**Questions for discussion**

What holds us in the affluent west in bondage? How might we become free of any constraints which blunt the message that God’s kingdom is amongst us?

How can we act to welcome people who are very different from us and respond to their needs as Jesus responded to the needs of the woman in today’s gospel story?

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***Make Paper chains:***

***Make a freedom chain***

***A craft activity to thank God for setting us all free.***

***You will need: strips of paper (approx. 15cm by 3cm), at least six strips per person; staplers, glue or sticky tape (or a combination of all three).***

* ***Jesus explains that he has set the woman in the story free. When we think of ‘freedom’ what images come to mind? One very well-known image is that of broken chains – think, ‘Amazing grace’!***
* ***Give out strips of paper and the staplers/glue/sticky tape. Invite people to make small chains using the strips they have been given. When everyone has completed this, invite people to join their chain to someone else’s to make a bigger one. Continue until there is one very long chain.***
* ***Ask for two or three volunteers to be ‘chained up’. Carefully wrap the giant paperchain around all of them. Remind everyone that Jesus meets people’s needs today and sets them free. Ask the volunteers to break out of their chains, and encourage everyone else to rejoice when they do! You could also sing ‘Amazing grace’ (or the appropriate verse of it).
E S***

***Symbolically break them!***

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord, today is the sabbath;
a day when we are called to rest from our labours and spend more time with you.
Help us to breathe deeply of your freshness and vitality
so that our strength is restored for the week ahead.
Help us to know the freedom that comes from being your followers
and to drink deeply from your resources.

**Lord who sees all: teach us to follow your lead.**

Father, we pray for all who are expecting exam results this week.
We know that education has been so disrupted over the past couple of years
so we pray for our exam students,
asking that you will be present with them as they collect their results.
Help the staff at schools to be alert to any students who are unhappy
and quick to point them in helpful directions.

**Lord who sees all: teach us to follow your lead.**

Lord God, we pray for all the forgotten people in our community.
We think of the housebound and elderly, children in care, the homeless, the migrants,
the lonely, those who are in unhappy homes who are afraid.
Forgive us that we do not know all of these people, but thank you that you care for each of them.
Help us to listen to your voice and respond to needs that you put on our hearts.
Give us the courage to step out of our comfort zones and follow where you take us.
Help us, as a church, to seek more ways of serving those in our community
who need our support.

**Lord who sees all: teach us to follow your lead.**

Lord, as the escalating cost of living affects us all,
help us not to forget that you are a generous God and you call us to be generous too.
There are always those who need more than we do,
so give us the wisdom to see how we can help.
We pray for our government as they cut the aid that they are sending around the world.
Help them to see that the needs of the world stretch beyond our borders.
Show them how to act justly rather than just seeking vote-winning policies.
As a church, help us to review how we give so that your justice is seen clearly throughout the world.

**Lord who sees all: teach us to follow your lead.**

Father, we pray for all who are imprisoned: whether they be in a physical jail
or imprisoned by their health, status in society or by their own emotions,
sorrows or fears.
We name out loud or in our hearts any we know who need your freeing touch right now…
Give us empathy for all who feel trapped and uncertain by their situations.
Show us how to bring your freeing love to them this week.

**Lord who sees all: teach us to follow your lead.**

Father, as we enter this new week, help us to rejoice in the freedom we have in you.
We thank you for your unconditional love for us and how you went to the cross to free us from the bondage of our sins.
We thank you that you rose from the grave to free us from death and to enable us to live in the freedom and joy of your love.
Help us to go from here renewed and invigorated by all that you are
and all that you have done.
Thank you for making us free.

**Amen**



**A prayer for all ages together**

Lord God,
help us to look for people’s needs.
(*make hands into binoculars and look around at everyone*)
Help us to respond to people’s needs.
(*walk around the room, smiling and waving to one another*)
And may people be set free.
(*jump up and down waving your arms in the air*)
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Heavenly God, as we go from here
give us the compassion we need to meet people’s needs,
help us to make time for those around us,
and may this community be a place of love and freedom –
for all. **Amen.**

1. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-16/bible-notes [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-16/the-week-in-focus [↑](#endnote-ref-2)