**Scripture: Luke 13:10-17 (NIV)**

[10] On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, [11] and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. [12] When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." [13] Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.
[14] Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."
[15] The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?
[16] Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"
[17] When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

**Sermon: Following Religion, But God Urges Following Jesus**

We are in the second week of the new series called, "**But God**." In this series, we are looking at a number of Bible stories where it appears to us that reality is one way, **but God**, in his miraculous power, makes a better reality, bringing his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We talked last week about Elijah, how he had done incredible things for God, including some miracles. But then Queen Jezebel put a price on his head. Elijah became hopeless and depressed and wanted to die. **But God** told Elijah that he still had a purpose, and God put Elijah back to work. *I heard several illustrations from you all last week of God's whisper of purpose.*

Today, we read about one of the many times Jesus had a run-in with the religious leaders. In this instance, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. It was common for rabbis traveling with their students to be granted permission to teach in a local synagogue. A passage was read, and the rabbi interpreted it as we still do in sermons today. We are not told where Jesus was, but things quickly became confrontational.

Let us put ourselves in the shoes of those who were there. Thinking as someone in the congregation, what would you expect to happen next? People knew this woman. She hadn't stood up straight for years. Jesus really healed her! People would have been amazed. They would have forgotten all about the service and would have wanted to see more of what Jesus could do. I would expect anybody there who had some kind of physical condition would have asked Jesus for healing. It would have been an incredible day!

Thinking as the pastor, I would have thought, "What just happened to my well-thought-out service? Healing someone wasn't in the order of worship! And who does he think he is, anyways? It is the Sabbath! There is no work to be done on the Sabbath! How do I save this from becoming a circus?"

Now, I don't know if the synagogue leader was afraid of Jesus, but instead of confronting Jesus, he turned to the people and said, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." That was the Law of Moses!

But Jesus stood up for the needs of the people, also using the Law.

Jesus reminded them all that the Law provided for the basic needs of their animals. The people were allowed, according to the Sabbath law, to untie their animals, lead them to water, and give them food. Shouldn't they do the same for people? It was already understood that if someone was critically ill, people could help them on the Sabbath. Jesus's stance was, "If you can unbind your animal (and heal someone critically ill), why was it not okay to unbind this woman who had been in this horrible condition for 18 years? Why wait?" Jesus was showing through his actions that caring about the needs of people was and is more important than an interpretation of a Law. LOVING PEOPLE is what God's Law is all about.

Jesus also had said that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was and is a blessing and a gift to humanity, intended to benefit and uplift, not to serve as a burdensome rule or tradition.

Now, to be fair, the Pharisees and other religious leaders were not bad guys. They believed with all their hearts that they were subject to Rome and that the Messiah had not yet come because people were not following the Law of Moses closely enough. They believed that Israel, as its own sovereign nation, could be restored if everyone would just follow the Law.

**But Jesus** came to speak as God, saying, "No. The Law is about loving God and loving people." By following their interpretations of the Law, they were hurting people – and when you hurt people, you hurt God.
The prophets talked about it, and Jesus experienced the same thing. Jesus had said that they were "straining a gnat and swallowing a camel," meaning they were emphasizing the wrong things. They were emphasizing the smallest parts of the Law while ignoring justice and kindness and mercy. Jesus called them hypocrites.

Jesus said, "You are following people's interpretations of religious law." But I say **(But God** says) follow me.

Organized religion is full of rules by its very definition. Every denomination has something called its Polity. Ours is our *United Methodist Book Of Discipline*. There are rules about how to be a member of the church, what committees we are supposed to have and how they are to function, what we can and cannot do with our building, how to become clergy, among many other things. It was first put together in 1784, and continues to be tweaked every four years since.

Different denominations have different rules about what you must agree to in order to be a member. There are different rules around baptism and Holy Communion. Some churches do not allow women pastors. Some churches still have rules about what you have to wear if you are leading up front or an usher. Our rules may be different, but churches all have rules.

Jesus illustrated in this passage that IF FOLLOWING THE RULES OF THE RELIGION ARE IN CONFLICT WITH FOLLOWING JESUS, OR MAKE IT HARDER TO FOLLOW JESUS, THE RELIGIOUS RULES ARE WRONG.

That was Jesus' point. Jesus talked about this a lot. There are people's religious rules. **But God** says follow Jesus. We need to follow Jesus.

People outside the church often call people in the church hypocrites. They say that we say one thing and do another. It is usually about following our understanding of religious rules and not following Jesus. It's usually about judging people and not loving them. Jesus said that people are more important. Above all, we love God and love people. The rules should always lead to that. (pause.)

We are not told how the story ends. Did the religious leaders ask Jesus to leave? Did they tell people that the service was over and that they should go home? Or did Jesus heal everyone there who needed it? Did they continue to follow their religious interpretations, or did they follow Jesus? I hope we do our best to follow Jesus.

That means caring about people over caring about what humanity has interpreted as God's will. Does everyone have what they need to survive? Does everyone have access to take care of their health? Is everyone given dignity? Let us recenter ourselves to follow Jesus and Jesus' way of life. Amen.