

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

- The location: the synagogue:
- The place of the reception of God's word, and of prayer.
- The day: the sabbath – a Saturday
- But remember: the day of God's rest; the day of rest for all.
- In the Small Catechism: ***We should honour and love God, and so we should not despise God's word or refuse to hear it. Instead, we should recognise that God's word is holy and be glad to hear and learn it.***
- At the heart of the command:
- God's service to us through his word,
- And the power of God's word to heal us and refresh us.

And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

- With a spirit: something beyond her that dragged her down.
- In the Gospels people can just be sick,
- But here something else is going on.
- Eighteen years is perhaps significant:
- Jesus has just talked of the eighteen who were killed,
- And called his hearers not to judge them
- As worse than themselves,
- But to turn from their own sins.
- Note also: her body language is significant: she is bent over
- Like a beast of burden: like an ox or donkey

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.'

- Jesus saw her, he called her, he spoke to her.
- Let's think about this progression: he saw her.
- All people are visible in this world, but who is seen?
- The rich, the beautiful, the powerful, the famous.
- People like this woman are socially invisible.
- But Jesus sees her.
- And his seeing leads to action: he calls her, and he speaks to her.
- Again, he says: **'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.'**
- This language of setting free is used also of sin:
- The burden she is carrying,
- The burden that Satan placed on her, is untied.
- Who is freeing her? God is; Jesus is.
- Then we hear these words:

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

- We know from the Gospels
- That Jesus doesn't need to touch people to heal them.
- They don't even need to be present to be healed.
- But there seems to be a completion of the progression here:
- He sees her, he calls to her, he speaks to her
- He touches her – he affirms her in body soul and spirit.
- And in response to this she stands up and praises God
- She regains her human dignity as one made in God's image.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to 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.'

- Now the narrative takes a turn: the leader of the synagogue
- Becomes indignant: why?
- Because, the text says, Jesus had cured on the sabbath.
- But why should this be a cause of indignation?
- It is not in fact against the law
- As it is written in Exodus and Deuteronomy,
- But the leader keeps saying to the crowd his words of indignation.
- A clue to what is really going on is given by what happens next:

But the Lord answered him and 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?'

- The Lord answers the man as an individual
- But then uses a plural form of address: hypocrites...
- Perhaps this is a way of including all those,
- Who would use their own interpretation of God's law
- In a hypocritical way (and we can be tempted in this, too).
- A note here about hypocrisy in the Gospels:
- Think of Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount
- Especially regarding almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.
- Jesus says it is hypocritical to do these things
- In order to get status from the human community,
- Rather than to have reward from the Father in heaven.
- The hypocrisy is in pretending
- That we are doing something for God's sake
- When we are really doing it so that people will honour us.

Now this leader of the synagogue

- Shows that he is not really concerned about God's law
- Being broken by Jesus,
- Because he would attend to his own animals on the sabbath.
- The leader is evidently concerned to show that *he* is in charge,
- That *he* calls the shots, not Jesus,
- That he can say what happens in his synagogue:
- *He is concerned about his status,*
- *Not the law of God as it is actually written,*
- And so, we could add, *not the needs of the woman.*
- A quote from one scholar in this point: ***The hypokrisis of the adversaries consists in the fact that they are concerned about their status with [human beings] rather than their standing before God. They thus fail to achieve the righteousness which they pretend to have.***
- True righteousness shows itself
- In simple obedience to the commands of God
- And so also in love for one's neighbour.
- To make this point clearer Jesus goes on:

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?'

- What is the sabbath day for?
- To show God how righteous we are?
- Or, worse yet,
- As a way of gaining status in the human community?
- No, the sabbath was made by God for human beings,
- Not human beings for the sabbath,
- And God's word is not given as a way for us
- To bolster our status in the human community,
- But to receive the gifts of healing and refreshment from God.
- So, the narrative ends this way:

When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

- This is evidently an echo of Isaiah 45
- Where all those who oppose *God* are ashamed and disgraced.
- Jesus shows us God in the flesh:
- The God who does wonderful things:
- Whose word brings healing and hope,
- So let us rest in him, as we receive his word to us.
- In Jesus' name. Amen.