

Year C – 11th Sunday after Pentecost; Lectionary 21 – August 24, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Luke 13:10-17

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, who commands us to honor a liberating Sabbath. Amen.

One of my colleagues shared a frustrating story this week... she has two small children who sit on the floor near the front of their sanctuary, and they quietly color while she leads worship.

They aren't making any noise or hurting anyone.

And the kids are actually paying attention... just like someone who knits a scarf during a meeting... they're just not paying attention in the same way that some of the adults think is appropriate.

So those adults are giving her a hard time about it... and they've even suggested that maybe she should tell her kids to go color in the narthex or the nursery.

These adults would rather there be *no kids* in worship... than to tolerate what they consider to be... the disrespectful behavior of coloring while hearing about God.

...it's almost as if the leaders from the synagogue where Jesus was teaching are now members of my colleague's church... and they still don't get it.

Now... I don't mean to throw shade over her people... because none of us are without fault. That's why we *all* need God's grace and mercy.

But what I hear in these texts today... from both Isaiah and the gospel, and from my colleague about her experience this past week... is that God's people have been struggling to follow God's commandments... for thousands of years.

It's not a new problem... but that's not an excuse... because we are only hurting ourselves.

How often have we given preference to rituals and traditions over radical hospitality and true welcome?

How often have we opted for the appearance of righteousness instead of doing the work of true reflection, repentance, and change?

...or opted for the appearance of clean and orderly city streets, sweeping away the problem... instead of addressing the system that created the problem?

How often do we smooth over a wound or treat only the symptoms... instead of addressing the root cause of the illness?

It's not a new problem... this failure to follow God's commandments... but we're only hurting ourselves because, as Isaiah tells us, our joy and delight in the Lord...

our joy and delight in this life... is connected to following these commandments... and to truly follow... we need each other.

And we know this... we know this deep in our core... that this is true.

God knows who we are... and knows what we need for a full and flourishing life. It's already been given to us. But we're stubborn.

I want to give you some context for our text from Isaiah... it takes place after those who had been exiled to Babylon were allowed to return home and begin rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. ...so roughly 500 BCE

If we had begun reading Isaiah 58 at verse 1, we would have heard that the people are frustrated because they have been fasting and crying out to God, but they feel God is ignoring them...

Isaiah tells them that God is *not* ignoring them, but has, in fact, been paying very close attention... and is... not pleased.

You see, they fast... while also committing injustice and abusing their workers, committing violence and causing harm to the poor and the oppressed.

They give the appearance of humble worship on the sabbath... while looking only to their own interests.

God... is not pleased... and declares... this is NOT the kind of fast I want! This is NOT how you honor the Sabbath!

So... starting at Isaiah 58:6 [NET version], God declares...

⁶ This is the kind of fast I want:

I want you to remove the sinful chains, to tear away the ropes of the burdensome yoke, to set free the oppressed, and then to break every burdensome yoke.

⁷ I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide homes for the homeless, oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe them!

⁸ Then your light will shine like the sunrise, your restoration will quickly arrive; your godly behavior will go before you, and the Lord's splendor will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call out, and the Lord will respond; you will cry out, and the Lord will reply, 'Here I am.'

That... that is the kind of fast our Lord desires... that is how we honor the Sabbath... not only today, but on all days...

Not by worshipping our rituals and traditions... or by declaring that our sanctuaries are no place for creativity and color...

We honor the Sabbath by doing our best to love others as God loves them...

by loving them and working for their liberation in *precisely* the way that God and Jesus and the Spirit have been telling us since the time of Moses.

We don't honor the sabbath by rounding up the homeless and shipping them out to another place... we honor the sabbath by feeding and housing them... and freeing them from the burdensome yoke of poverty and oppression.

That is Sabbath liberation!

We don't honor the Sabbath by locking away everyone who breaks the law, no matter how minor the infraction. We honor the Sabbath by addressing the systems that drive someone to be desperate enough to commit crimes.

That is Sabbath liberation!

In Deuteronomy, we hear that we are to keep and honor the Sabbath... to keep it holy... for you once were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord God *freed* you.

The Sabbath is made for liberation... from toil, from bondage, from hunger... not only for us... but for all.

But how easily we forget... in our gospel, Jesus freed that poor woman from her infirmity that kept her bent over for 18 long years.

Jesus freed her from the infirmity that Satan used to keep her bound up and isolated from her community... alone and ashamed.

And the religious leaders have the audacity to be indignant... they don't get it...

They cannot honor Sabbath liberation for themselves... while this woman, their neighbor, is still suffering under bondage.

Our liberation... our true Sabbath liberation... is communal.

And once we understand this... once we understand that, as Dr. Lilla Watson once said, "...your liberation is bound up with mine."

...only then does our true light shine...

When we understand that our true Sabbath liberation is bound up with the liberation of the whole community... *then* ... the Lord will guide us continually...

Then... the Lord will provide for us even in parched places, and make our bones strong, and like a spring of water that never fails...

When we understand that our true Sabbath liberation is communal... *then* we become repairers of broken walls... and restorers of livable streets.

When we understand that our true Sabbath liberation is communal...

Then our senses are awakened, and we recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in and through all the ways that neighbors are working together to put the needs of the full community ahead of their own selfish desires.

Communities will be rebuilt, and areas that have been impoverished and deserted will flourish. Neighbors will know and care for each other for generations.

Many in our culture today would call this some kind of woke, socialist agenda... but this way of living is much bigger than that... this way of living was God's design for us from the beginning.

When we do this... when we decide to trust the Lord, our God and really lean into what God desires for us...

Then... our Sabbath liberation becomes a delight... and a joy.

This is how God asks us to honor the Sabbath... by breaking the chains of oppression... and by not tolerating injustice.

The results are the reward.

But hear this, friends... the work of breaking the bonds of sin and injustice to bring about full and true Sabbath liberation... is ongoing work.

God knows this... and we know it, too.

And so, you must also observe Sabbath rest... a holy pause... a time to stop and reflect on all God has done, and dwell in the JOY of the Lord!

You do not honor God by making your productivity an idol... or by forgetting that this work against injustice can only be accomplished together.

You do not honor God by trying to do it all by yourself.

The Lord, your God, commands you to take a holy pause... and notice that you, and those around you, are part of a community.

So, as you rest from your labors, encourage others to rest, too. Make it possible for them to do so. Worship the Lord, your God, and give thanks for all God has done for you.

And if it would help you to feel more relaxed and connected... you are more than welcome to sit up front here and color. Amen.

Dr. Lilla Watson (b. 1940) is a Murri (Indigenous Australian) artist, activist, and educator from Queensland, Australia. Her full quote is, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."