

Next Sunday we will say Godspeed to Don and Carolyn Maunz. There will be a special coffee hour after the service. If you are able to help with canapes, baked goods, fruit etc., that would be greatly appreciated by the Hospitality Committee. Don and Carolyn have been a huge part of the life of this church from building and maintenance projects, to music, to Christian Education. Carolyn collected cans of food with the Sunday School for the Food Pantry. In her honor, we have decided to collect school supplies for South Bristol School. Connie Kennedy has provided a list of supplies needed by the children:

- lined paper for the notebooks
- dividers (8 color)
- crayons
- colored pencils
- thin markers (assorted)
- colored pens
- index cards
- water bottles

Also this Sunday, Punky Adams' Memorial Service is at 2:00. We are hoping for enough refreshments to supply both the coffee hour and the memorial service reception.

Yesterday we held Brad Blodgett and Sally Loughridge in prayer. I received another up date from Steve today:

We have some encouraging news to report. Sally's CT scan this morning showed a slight improvement in her brain, a baby step forward, but a significant one. They have cut back on some of her meds, including for pain, and she is doing well with this. She appears to be in less pain. She is receiving less oxygen and maintaining a good O2 level. She slept better last night and has been sleeping most of today without sleep meds. She has been receiving Ensure through a feeding tube, so getting more protein and "solid" food, which she needs. Her vital signs are improved and more consistent, although she still goes in and out of a-fib once in a while. They are checking her for infection regularly and there is none. However, she is still delirious most of the time, with occasional lucid phrases. This is a classic presentation with this type of injury, and it's treatment, and I have been reassured of this more than once. She also had an X-ray of her chest this morning, which was clear for any signs of congestion, and the X-ray of her neck this morning showed no change to the hardware that was installed from C1 to C3 to stabilize the fracture in C2.

So, all in all, I am encouraged. Sally is not out of the woods yet, but she is headed in the right direction. The healing process is going to take some time. As you all know, the nurses are the ones on the front lines of care, and the nursing team here is first rate - professional, caring and compassionate. They agree with my sense that visits are premature right now but when Sally is a little better and not delirious visits will be beneficial. I'll let you know as soon as that happens.

Although impossible to predict with any accuracy, she may be in the ICU about another week, and in the hospital another two, during which she will be doing re-hab work.

I've cc'd a lot of you on this but I'm sure not everyone, so I'd ask you to spread the word to the paint groups, book club, gym groups etc. Most of all, thank you all for all your prayers and healing thoughts sent this way, which we feel and know have helped. And thanks also for all your cards, and the beautiful flowers, which have added real cheer to the room. I'll be continuing to stay here at the Arbor House until I'm confident I can be away for more extended periods and will send updates periodically.

Steve

HEBREW BIBLE Isaiah 58:9b-14 - Jane Sandler
EPISTLE Hebrews 12:18-29 - Roger Sandler
GOSPEL Luke 13:10-17

MESSAGE Stand up straight Pastor Beth Hood

My father has always had excellent posture. I don't know if it's from his years at West Point or if it was natural. And he was a stickler for it. I remember as a little girl being told to imagine there was a string at the top of my head that was being pulled taut. Pull my stomach in, tuck my but in and so on. And I have scoliosis so it was more of a challenge than either of us realized. It is bothersome to him and sad for us to see now that he can no longer hold that posture. I was shocked last week when I visited to see him for the first time on a walker as he returned from therapy where he is trying once again to straighten up.

So, of course, that was the part of the Gospel story this morning that caught my attention. The Scripture says that the lady had been 'bowed together'. This was a term for curvature of the spine. For a period of 18 years she had suffered. And since the Jews traced all evil to the power and presence of Satan, she had been judged as a great sinner.

Just imagine what that woman's life was like. Lean over and look down. Now, still bent over, turn your head to the left. And now to the right. On this beautiful morning in Maine in the company of these people who love you, imagine that all you could see was the small piece of ground around your toes, or what you can look at 'on a slant'. The bent over woman was captive, bound by her ailment. She could not move freely. She could not meet another person, even those who loved her, face to face. She could not look up to see the salvation, the healing, coming to her in the person of Jesus Christ.

According to the records of the Gospel writers, at this time in his ministry, Jesus was no longer teaching and preaching in the synagogues. But on this particular Sabbath, he did return to teach. This is the last account of him doing so.

Jesus was teaching, he noticed the woman, and he spoke words of healing to her: "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." And then he touched her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

You would think that all of the people around her would be praising God. But these 'good people' remained as confined as she had been. They were confined by rules, by the law. They were people who lived orderly lives and never noticed the suffering around them. Jesus had broken those rules and put human welfare over religious obligation.

In the very next verses, Jesus asked the question, "What is the reign of God like?" In his act of healing, Jesus had shown the people what the reign of God was like, and then he went on to talk about it too. Not just empty words, but action, too.

It was the action, the healing that was a problem for the Pharisees—those people who tried so hard to be faithful by paying lots of attention to the rules. It was a problem because of when it happened, not to whom or by whom or how it was accomplished. Come back tomorrow, the synagogue leader said, when it's alright for healings to be performed. Wait a little longer.

These were both good men, two faithful Jewish men each struggling with what it means to be faithful. The synagogue leader wasn't mean-spirited; he was calling for what he believed to be obedient faithfulness. And Jesus was doing the same. They both wanted to observe the Sabbath. They just didn't agree on what that way was.

Jesus says the time for salvation isn't tomorrow. It's right now, no matter what day it is. In fact, maybe Sabbath is the perfect time for healing.

Jesus routinely did things on the Sabbath that angered the religious authorities. And in every case Jesus took the opportunity to remind them that despite their pious intentions, they had rather significantly misunderstood the very purpose behind the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was meant to be a day of delight, rest, enjoyment. Exodus 20 grounds the practice in creation (“...for in six day the Lord God created the heavens and the earth...”) In Deuteronomy 5 the Sabbath is grounded in redemption (“...remember that you were slaves in Egypt but that the Lord your God led you out of that land...”) Sabbath has to do with both creation and redemption.

After six days of creating according to Genesis, the Lord God rested on the seventh day, not because he was exhausted and in need of an afternoon nap. No, what God did on the seventh day was the same thing Adam and Eve were to do on their first full day of existence—revel in and delight over the creation. On the redemption side, the Sabbath is a reminder that God has liberated us from all that is evil and injurious to human flourishing. We take joy in remembering that God is redeeming the creation, salvaging all that evil has sullied so as to return it to the glory God intended in the beginning.

Over time the devout in Israel, as the devout are prone to do took the fourth commandment and added 613 other rules and regulations all in an effort carefully to define work and to help people avoid even a hint of performing work on the Sabbath. What was supposed to be a day of joy in creation and redemption became a frightening day in which people worried the whole day long that they might mess up and perform a deed of work.

It is a sad thing when religion-however piously intended-becomes a tool to prop up the views of a few no matter who gets hurt by such efforts. The Sabbath day was always intended to be a day of joy and creation revelry.

Without even realizing it, the authorities had granted a higher status to a donkey than to the average human being. You see, those same people who objected to Jesus healing the bent-over woman could untie an animal for the purpose of getting it to a watering trough. No one wanted to see an expensive piece of livestock die of dehydration on a Sabbath, so they had added a proviso to the Sabbath regulations that that was not an act of work. But no one had thought to add a proviso or caveat about helping a human being on the Sabbath.

So what Jesus did on that day to this poor woman did not meet with approval.

If we are called to love Jesus and to love the way Jesus loved, it's clear that this story gives us a model of what it means to be the church- the Body of Christ-not just on Sunday but every day. Jesus is the model for all of us as. Every single one of us, in our daily lives, has the occasion to encounter the bent-over woman.

There are people who are weighed down and bent over by loneliness, grief, worry, anxiety and doubt. People who are confused by a world that preaches a word of its own, a false word that often leads them, leads us astray from God's plan and God's goodness and God's will for our lives. There are people whose financial difficulties or mental illness or physical ailments or business troubles feel like burdens that bend them over and weigh them down. The bent-over woman doesn't necessarily ask for healing—she didn't in the story. She just appeared, out of the shadows where pressed-down people so often live, and Jesus noticed her and reached out.

Why are we here? I don't think it's to enjoy one another's company. I see pictures all the time of you all getting together in other venues. Most of us aren't here because we like to sing or see our friends or even because we feel we should be in church. We are here this morning because somewhere in the deepest part of our spirit is a hunger for the reign of God. We long for healing, and the justice, and the love and acceptance, and the peace that is the reign of God. We are here because we've come to know that we can't fix this world on our own. Our only real choice is to turn to God and one another for what we need and long for.

We're called to do more than to proclaim the word, we are called to en flesh it, to become a word of hope for all those who appear before us, bearing burdens, pressed down. Dr. Martin Luther King once said, “Let us

rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter-but beautiful-struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the children of God.”

We are in an in-between time—Jesus has already begun the kingdom of God, but it’s not yet here in its fullness. Some days it is easier to see the not-yet instead of the already, the not-yet of a broken world full of dehumanizing realities. We must raise up our heads and see that our redemption draws near, that what’s still to come, surely coming is a dream of peace and justice and healing and mercy, and we know that we can count on that, because God has promised us that.

In the meantime, we must help each other to rise up, like the bent-over woman and give thanks and praise to the One who formed us in love and has called us to live in that love, and in justice, and in peace. Amen