

Luke 14:1-6 (Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)
 “Watching Jesus Closely”
 Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
 August 28, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel Lesson recorded in Luke 14:

¹And it happened that when He came to eat bread on the Sabbath in the house of a certain ruler of the Pharisees and they were watching Him closely, ²behold, a certain man before Him was suffering from dropsy. ³And Jesus answered and said to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath or not?” ⁴And they remained silent. And taking hold of him, He healed him and released him. ⁵And He said to them, “Who of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well will not immediately pull him up on the day of the Sabbath?” ⁶And they were not able to answer back to these things.

In January 1984, Rockwell released his international chart-topping song, “Somebody’s Watching Me.” You hear it more frequently on the radio around Halloween-time. The chorus says, “I always feel like somebody’s watchin’ me / And I have no privacy / I always feel like somebody’s watchin’ me / Who’s playing tricks on me?” At any rate, this is the song that popped into my head in reading the opening verse of today’s Gospel reading “when [Jesus] came to eat bread on the Sabbath in the house of a certain ruler of the Pharisees and they were watching Him closely.”

Why were the Pharisees watching Jesus with such scrutiny at this dinner following the Sabbath-day synagogue service? Well, Jesus had a habit of doing things that the Pharisees said was unlawful to do on the Sabbath. Over time, many traditions had been added to God’s Commandment about the Sabbath Day which specified numerous categories of work to avoid on the Sabbath. These made the Sabbath a detailed and burdensome observance for the people. You could say that it was hard work **not** to do work on the Sabbath. One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, as was His custom. A man was there whose right hand

was withered. St. Luke writes in chapter 6:7, "And the scribes and the Pharisees watched Him closely to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath in order that they might find charges to bring against Him." And what did Jesus do? "But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come and stand here.' And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?' And after looking around at them all he said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:8–11 ESV).

In Luke 13, one chapter before our text today, Jesus was again teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. There was a woman who had an evil spirit for 18 years that caused her to be bent over and not able to fully straighten up. Jesus saw her and said to her, "Woman, you are released from your disability." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God (Luke 13:10-13). But the synagogue ruler was outraged "because Jesus healed on the Sabbath" (13:14). He told the congregation, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.' Then the Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?' As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him" (Luke 13:14–17 ESV).

Mere verses later, our text for today has Jesus, on another Sabbath, this time at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. And what were they doing? "Watching Him closely." It seems that the experts in the law and the Pharisees were hoping that He would break the Sabbath rules again so that they might finally do something about His blatant disregard for their traditions.

And Jesus does not disappoint those watching Him. A man with dropsy comes into their midst. Dropsy isn't a word that we use anymore. It's the condition that we know as generalized edema, bodily swelling due to an excess of fluid. Not a disease in itself, it is an indication that something is not right in the body, like congestive heart failure or kidney disease. Now, we don't know why this man is at the Pharisee's dinner party. It seems unlikely that he would have been invited because he would have been considered ceremonially unclean because his swelling was viewed as a punishment for sin (which was not the case). Whatever the reason, this man is before Jesus. And Jesus once again heals on the Sabbath.

Jesus knows that He is being closely watched. Luke writes, "Behold, a certain man before Him was suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and said to the lawyers and Pharisees." What is he answering? There isn't anything recorded that they had said. Again, Jesus knew what was in their hearts and minds and so he answered their objections without them uttering a word, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath or not?" And they remained silent. If they said "yes" then they have no reason to charge Jesus with breaking the Sabbath laws now or before! If they said "no" then they are caught forbidding helping another person and breaking the law of love for the neighbor.

Jesus had already taught that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The day of rest, which is what the Hebrew word *sabbath* means, was intended by God to restore people, not to make them slaves of arbitrary rules and regulations that come about by way of the tradition of people. As God rested on the seventh day following the six days of creation, so the Lord gifted to people a day of rest from the everyday labors of life. It especially gives people time to hear the Word of God that they would not normally have because of the busyness of life. We read in the *Large Catechism*, "Now, in the Old Testament, God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest. He commanded that it should be regarded as holy above all other days. This commandment was given only to the Jewish people for this outward obedience, that they should stop toilsome work and rest. In that way both man and beast might recover and not be weakened by endless labor. Later, the Jewish people restricted the Sabbath too closely and greatly abused it. They defamed Christ and could not endure in Him the same works that they themselves would do on that day, as we read in the Gospel. They acted as though the commandment were fulfilled by doing no manual work whatsoever. This, however, was not the meaning. But, as we shall hear, they were supposed to sanctify the holy day or day of rest. . . . [On] this day of rest (since we can get no other chance), we have the freedom and time to attend divine service. We come together to hear and use God's Word, and then to praise God, to sing and to pray. . . . This is the simple meaning of the commandment: People must have holidays. Therefore, such observances should be devoted to hearing God's Word so that the special function of this day of rest should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people. Yet the resting should not be strictly understood to forbid any work that comes up,

which cannot be avoided."¹ And the showing of love and mercy cannot be avoided on the Sabbath Day or any other day! The Sabbath does not cancel out the law to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus' work of healing on the Sabbath, then, actually fulfilled the Sabbath Day's purpose: to provide blessing for God's people. Were you watching Jesus closely in our text? What does He do with the man who is suffering? "And taking hold of him, He healed him and released him." Jesus healed this man from that which was causing his swelling. Not only is the edema gone, but so is the root cause. He is healed. And the man is also released. The English Standard Version translates this as "sent him away." This is certainly possible, but the word is used frequently in the context of setting free, releasing, and pardoning from a painful condition or from sin. I think there's more here than Jesus simply healing the man from his physical problem and sending him off. There's a real setting free, not only from disease, but also from the power of sin and death which is the ultimate disease. Jesus' brought this man the Sabbath blessing of rest and release, as He said to the woman on a previous Sabbath, "You are released from your disability." Jesus grants the very gift of God that the Sabbath intended to bring to people.

And that is true for us as well. Jesus sees our need, heals us, and releases us from sin and death with His blessings of forgiveness and eternal life. Our Lord takes hold of us by the power of His Holy Spirit through Baptism. He claims us as children of the heavenly Father by His blood shed for us on the cross. There He suffered the pains of sin and its consequences.

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 376-368.

He faced hellish death for us. He rested in death in the tomb on the Sabbath. But He rose again victorious over sin, death, and hell on the first day of the week. And so it is that believers in Jesus gather together on this first day of the week in celebration of our Lord's resurrection. We gather in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to receive the Sabbath blessings of rest and release from sin, death, and hell that our Savior gives to us through His Word and blessed Sacrament.

In the words of Absolution, the blessings of the Gospel are spoken into your ears in a personal way. Through these words you receive the salvation earned by Jesus on the cross of Calvary; every sin covered by His blessed death and resurrection. You are released; you are free. Like the Absolution, the Sermon delivers the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ on the cross. In the Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus delivers His blessings to you personally as you eat His Body and drink His Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Here in the Divine Service, on this our Day of Rest, your Lord and Savior gifts you His blessings of forgiveness and salvation. He continues to rescue you from your sins, releasing you from your guilt, and granting you heavenly blessings by means of His Gospel Word. That's what the Sabbath is for. It is your day of rest and release, of rescue and of blessing. And if you watch the Lord Jesus closely throughout the Divine Service, you will see Him at work where He promises to be—in His Gospel Word and Sacrament—for you, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Amen.