In the Gospel passage that we read earlier from Luke, Jesus and his disciples came across this young woman who had been suffering a bent back for more than 18 years of her life. Perhaps some of you could relate to this personally as well. She was unable to stand up straight…and obviously she stood out amongst the crowd. As you would imagine, she was probably ridiculed, bullied, and ostracized not only by her community, perhaps even her own family as well, simply because she was different. But who was there to stand up and advocate for her. No one wanted any part of her whatsoever. They were afraid that they might become spiritually unclean, if they came near her or touch her accidentally due to her physical disability and demonized spirit.

 However, if you read it more carefully, this unidentified woman never really approached Jesus and ask to be healed, perhaps she thought that she would never be healed again for the rest of her life or was used to being ignored. But instead, it was the other way around. It was Jesus who noticed her first and expressed compassion towards her…for her physical disability, emotional pain and scars that she bears on her. Everyone was anxiously waiting to see what Jesus would do…including all the religious leaders. They wanted to see whether Jesus was going to heal her or not. Sure enough, Jesus called her over and laid his hands on her and she was immediately healed. For the 1st time in more than 18 years, this woman stood up straight on her back and she began praising God for this miracle.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Once again, Jesus crossed the social boundaries by touching a woman AND also someone with a disability and seemingly spiritually demonic. But all along, Jesus only saw this woman for who she was…as a “Daughter of Abraham” who was bounded by Satan.[[2]](#footnote-2) She needed someone to rescue her and to liberate her. Jesus happened to be at the right place and at the right time.

 However, instead of focusing upon the miraculous healing that took place of this physically challenged woman, the center of attention was quickly shifted over, to the fact that this all took place on a Sabbath day. What seemed to be the big deal, you may ask? If you see someone in need, aren’t you suppose to help him or her? What does it matter if it occurs on certain day of the week? Well, according to some, this was a HUGE No-No. Why wait another day if an opportunity presents itself to help someone in need or to bring light to the message of hope and salvation?

This wasn’t the first time that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, which sparked the controversy. Each time he simply did what he felt was the right thing to do, not worried about what day it was, but instead what needed to be done. He cared more about the soul of the individuals rather than the legality of the situation. Mercy triumphs over judgment.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The observance of the Sabbath is meant to celebrate the completion and the wholeness of God’s creation, so therefore it was totally fitting for Jesus to heal and to make someone’s life whole once again on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is meant to be a day of fulfilling God’s holiness, rather than to point out someone has violated the law.**

**Furthermore, the spirit of honoring the Sabbath is intended to be a spiritual discipline rather than a ritual or exercise.** **It’s not something that you “do” but rather something that you “live” each day.** As we read about Eric Liddel last week, who refused to compete on the Christian Sabbath during the 1923 Paris Olympic because he wanted to dedicated this special day for God and for God’s purpose and glory. He lived by what he preached…and all of us should do likewise as well.

As we’ve seen from time to time, Jesus would turn an incident like this into a teaching moment for his disciples and the crowd. **What’s more important? Observing the legalistic regulations that may no longer be relevant to its time OR responding and extending God’s mercy to someone who’s desperately in need of healing?**

How many of us are willing to stand up and do what Jesus did, when situation presents itself to cross over the various boundaries and to extend God’s mercy and compassion towards others? Can we afford to be complacent when we see injustices happening all around us and in the world? Are we willing to take a stand, perhaps a step out of our comfort zone, and swim against the current flow, like Jesus did, in order to bring rescue and healing to someone who is in need today?

Two summers ago there was this huge devastating flood down in the southern Louisiana and Mississippi area. Over 30,000 people had to be evacuated with over 40,000 homes flooded and destroyed after over 30” of rain had fallen. If you thought the rain that we had the other day was bad, this was much more widespread and prolong. Amazingly only a handful of people lost their lives, if it were not for the many unsung heroes of 1st responders, rescuers and volunteers.

One story that had gone viral across the internet was the rescue effort of this one man. His name was David Phung, who volunteered to search for victims who might be trapped inside their homes or vehicles. He was just an ordinary citizen, who had no rescue training background whatsoever, so technically he was not qualified to do any of this. What he had was a boat and a heart of his fellow neighbors in need.

While they were on search and rescue mission, David and a couple of his friends, along with a TV crew, came across this woman who was trapped in her sinking vehicle with her dog. If it wasn’t for his quick thinking, that woman and her dog would probably not be alive today. They knew what their mission was and that God put them in the right place and at the right time. What struck me the most about this amazing miraculous rescue was that the demeanor that David handled himself with humility and humbleness after the incident. Oh by the way, did I mention that all of this took place also on a Sunday – the traditional Sabbath Day!?!

David was just one of many heroes who have put their lives on the line in order to rescue and save others. Their faith and courage were quite extraordinary. They were not professional rescuers and 1st responders. They did what they had to do at that moment, even if it might mean violating a few laws or standard protocols.

As we read in our opening *Call to Worship* earlier, the Psalmist declared that *God is our refuge and [our strength]. We will never be put to shame. God will deliver us and rescue us, and will incline His ears to us and save us. For God is our rock and our fortress.*[[4]](#footnote-4) God will call upon us even when we are at the least expected or the least fit, yet we are the most qualified to carry out God’s mission assigned to us!

In the same way, as we read in our Old Testament passage earlier, we saw how God called out someone who was young and unqualified to be a liberator of God’s people. Even before he was born, the young Jeremiah was consecrated to be a prophet to the nation and its people. As Jeremiah described, God “knew” us even before we were formed in our mother’s womb and has appointed us to our callings in this world.

 By the virtue of our baptism, all of us are being “called” by God for a special purpose in order to participate in God’s holy mission here on earth. We don’t need to be a super-hero or attempt daring rescue missions in order to save the lives of others. God will use us in any ways God sees fit, according too God’s purpose and not ours. We don’t need to go around telling people what acts of kindness that we have done either. God knows and God sees what’s in our hearts and on our minds. As I mentioned earlier, our calling is to make an impact upon the lives of others, echoing the life motto of Jackie Robinson.

 Often times we question our very own abilities that God has granted us with. We downplay our ability to speak, about our age (of being too young or too old) or our lack of skills, talents, or other resources to carry out what God has challenged us. We make excuses to those in needs in order to evade God’s calling and opportunities for service and actions to help others. We choose to walk on the other side when we see someone in need laying on the roadside along our path.

But God has a specific plan and purpose for each of us, chosen to be the right person, at the right time and for the right task…whatever that is. God knows what we are capable of doing and what we are not. **God delights in us when we seek God through our heartfelt obedience, in carrying our extraordinary acts of compassion towards others.** As 1st Samuel challenged the Israelites that *“****to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed [is better] than the fat of the rams.****”[[5]](#footnote-5)*

 God does not call only those who are already equipped and qualified, but God will equip those who respond faithfully to their extraordinary callings…however unqualified they think they may be. **God will equip us and transform us, if we are willing to listen and to follow the Spirit’s leading.**

As the Psalmist reminded us that our “*God is our rock of refuge and a strong fortress. God will rescue us from the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and the cruel of evil. For you, O Lord, are our hope and our trust.”[[6]](#footnote-6)* May God continue to shed grace and hope upon us even in the midst of trials and challenges that we face. May God continue to show us extraordinary places where God’s miracles are taking place and lives are being restored through the liberation of the people. May all thanks and praise be to God, our Rock, our Refuge and our Redeemer. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 13:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 13:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *James 2:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Psalm 71:1-3* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *I Samuel 15:22* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Psalm 71:3-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)