

Pastor Roy's sermon from August 25, 2019

Isaiah sets the stage for a conversation on freedom. Israel is returning from exile. Some have abundance. Some have almost nothing but what they can do with their hands. And the peasants who remained in the land already have the yoke of enslavement around their necks. Those with means can work the angles so that they remain quite comfortable and the poor remain quite poor. Isaiah promises that if food is shared with the hungry, and if the afflicted, the permanent poor are cared for, then light will rise in darkness as gloom is replaced by noon day sun.

The gratefully generous will find abundance and peace, not for themselves, but for others. They will be strong, like a well-watered garden. They will be free to share.

The writer of Hebrews calls us to seek and build a kingdom which cannot be shaken—God's unshakeable kingdom. The writer speaks not of things or power, but reverence and awe for the consuming fire of God. This is not the fire of punishment but the fire of love, the fire we heard of last week—the fire of the Word which brings us humbly to be united in worship, called to gratitude and generosity. Called in freedom to freely worship and live the love of God.

Jesus encounters a woman who has suffered for 2 decades unable to stand up straight. The only thing between her and free movement is that it's Saturday and the Sabbath is for rest. Evidently some thought that helping someone is work which comes between you and God. Now, sabbath law is good for reminding everyone that there is a delicate balance with work and rest. The law reminded the people that they are set apart for God. God enjoys them and they enjoy God. Rest is a reminder to trust deeply. Rest fills us with joy. The one day of rest is a reminder that every day is a day for trust and compassion. So when Jesus has the chance to choose between resting as a valuable discipline and compassion for a neighbor, he chooses compassion. He has learned generosity from discipline.

Compassion is proof of freedom. He was able to choose for her because he was not in bondage to helping her. His Sabbath discipline taught him freedom and set him free to set her free.

Our life in the Spirit is about true freedom. Being able to choose without being compelled by this or that. Sometimes we feel compelled to help. True

compassion is hidden by the loss of choice. Freedom demands a choice. If we need to be helpful, just because, if we are compelled to help, we are not freely choosing to help. If we are driven by guilt or shame or duty, we are not free. Rest restores our freedom and our joy in serving. Too much work fills us with dread. Compassion flows from rest which allows time to form relationships. These two different motivations for service bring about very different end results.

Jesus heals the woman because he has rested and can love the woman. Rest creates space for love. Busyness leads to compulsion and guilt and shame.

May we spend time in rest so that we can be mindful of our choices and freedom.
Amen.