

Sermon on **Luke 13:10-17** – Stewardship of Time – A Time to Pause
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – 1.22.23 – Pastor N. Scharf

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion did exactly what the Wizard of Oz has asked them to do. In order for him to help Dorothy return home to Kansas, and help the others get a brain, a heart, and courage, he had said that first they needed to go defeat the Wicked Witch of the West (confident that they wouldn't be able to do it). Of course, against all odds, they did it! Dorothy melted the witch with a bucket of water, and returned to the wizard. "We'd like you to keep your promise to us, if you please, sir."

Shocked that they actually returned and asked him to make good on his promise, he says, "Not so fast. Not so fast! I'll have to give the matter a little thought. Go away and come back tomorrow." "Tomorrow?" Dorothy asks with such disbelief and sadness. "Oh, but I wanna go home now!"

"Do not arouse the wrath of the great and powerful Oz! I said come back tomorrow!" shouts the Wizard, who is neither great nor powerful; he's stalling, because he has no idea how he might help.

Today we focus on our Stewardship of Time in our "There is a time for everything series," and Jesus shows us the importance of "A Time to Pause."

This Can't Wait Until Tomorrow
1) Freeing you from Satan's Power.
2) Leading you to Glorify Him.

This Can't Wait Until Tomorrow - At the start of our gospel reading, the great and powerful Jesus is holding an audience. "*Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.*" All the usual suspects were there, the every Sabbath worshipers, the synagogue ruler, the upstanding members of the community. But then, in walks a woman even more small and meek than Dorothy. We read she "*had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.*" She's singing no song about "if I only had a brain, or heart, or courage," because she needs all of those things and then some. She doesn't seek an audience; she's done no great deeds, she's slain no witch—she can't do anything—she's so bent over, her spine so curved and so damaged that she can't even straighten up, and what's worse is that it's an evil spirit that has done this to her. We hear of no friends to help her. We hear no words from her. And Jesus the great and powerful? Well, he's busy—maybe she should just come back tomorrow.

But then this: *Behold!* In other words, the Holy Spirit is saying, "Look!" Notice this woman. Her? Why? Because otherwise we wouldn't. Sitting in the back pew—feeling she doesn't belong like the others. Ready to duck out at a moment's notice.

Behold! What?! Who sees her? *Behold*, the Holy Spirit says through Luke, telling us to look with the eyes of the hero here—and who is that? Not the synagogue ruler—he *would* prefer she comes back tomorrow. Not the pious listeners—they're studiously ignoring her. Look with whose eyes? Jesus' eyes. He's not too busy with his sermon to interrupt it when he sees her. Who? Her? That woman? The woman with a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years! Helpless, outcast, doesn't belong—her!

"*But when Jesus saw her, he called her to him.*" "Oh no, this is the part where he scolds her, right? He'll say, 'You're dealing with a demon, this must be your fault. Take an example everyone--don't be like this lady! Or maybe he scolds her--you don't belong here! Not in the synagogue, look at your clothes, your hair, your sickly figure. Why can't you come when I'm teaching in the streets or something? Can't this wait?'"

No. What does Jesus say? "*Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.*" What?! I'm sorry--what did you say? Without delay? No "come back tomorrow?" Behold as Jesus looks with his compassionate eyes. **This can't wait until tomorrow.** He doesn't want to wait one more moment to restore her. He calls her up to the front! "Yes, you belong here!" And Jesus the great and powerful says, "Woman, from this moment on—without a moment to lose—you are free!"

She's been hunched over for eighteen years; could she even remember what it meant to stand up straight? So, Jesus guides her: *Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.*

Can you picture it? Jesus straightening her out—no, seriously, you can stand like this now! Look how tall you are! And notice what else happens? Until this moment, she has done nothing. We've heard nothing from her. She was just *there—hunched over, unseen, uncared for.* But what do we see immediately after Jesus preaches this living sermon? "*Immediately she straightened up and praised God.*" Not only is her spine straight. Through Jesus' power and love her soul is raised up, and just as quickly as Jesus had compassion on her, she responds in praise to her God.

You step into church, maybe stepping into the back pew, not because it's where you always sit, but because you don't want to be noticed. Or you come to your normal pew and try to look normal, but inside you are hunched over with

the demands and demons of this life, fighting against a soul that is curved in on itself because of sin and the Devil. You are helpless. You don't deserve to be here, in the audience of the great and powerful Jesus, not with all these other people who look like they have it put together. He'll teach here, but it won't be for you. Maybe you can try him again tomorrow.

Behold. For a moment, don't look at your Sunday morning through your eyes, or the eyes of other people here, or the pastor's eyes. Look through Jesus' eyes. *Behold.* He sees you—oh, yes, all of you. Every last crack and creak of spine and soul. Not just here, look at your weekday morning through Jesus' eyes. You open your Bible—the coffee hasn't kicked in yet, you can barely see the words on the page. *Behold.* In every devotion, you have more of Jesus' attention than he has of yours. You gather the family for a devotion; you feel self-conscious, "we're not *that* family, we're not put-together enough. The kids won't even sit still." *Behold.* See yourself with his eyes. He sees how helpless you are without him, how you can in no way raise yourself up. So, he doesn't wait, he speaks! He has to—this can't wait until tomorrow! He speaks with the living and active Word of God: "*Woman, man, child, you are set free from your infirmity!*" And once again, from that moment on—you, yes you, even you, are free and forgiven! The great and powerful Jesus humbled himself to take our place, our sin, our shame, our embarrassment before God, and he humbled himself to death on a cross so that you and I are spared, noticed, washed clean by his blood and forgiven. God notices you and loves you.

That's always what the Sabbath was all about. That was the day when God led the Israelites to enjoy the rest only he can provide. That's still what the 3rd commandment is about—"*Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.* What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." Why? It is because in our time with his Word God gives us rest and freedom from our sin and infirmities, **Freeing you from Satan's Power. This Can't Wait Until Tomorrow. He's Freeing you and Leading you to Glorify Him.**

How do they react? The synagogue ruler was indignant! "Why didn't you come to be healed tomorrow!" This is proof that wherever Jesus' word is; there is opposition. Wherever Jesus' does something wonderful, the devil is working hard and the sinful nature is working hard to ignore it, or avoid it, or put it off. The synagogue ruler isn't the only one who comes with sorry excuses to tell Jesus that *he* should come back tomorrow. We can do that too!

Even though the day we got a Nintendo NES at 1215 S. 100th St. may have been one of the greatest days of my childhood, as a parent 30 years later I can't stand modern online video gaming for one reason, it doesn't have a pause button. I yell to the boys downstairs, "come on up for dinner, bed, devotion," you name it, but I hear, "I'm almost finished with the game, or It's not over yet." Every day, and every weekend, Jesus gives us a chance to pause and rest in his Word. But do we treat the church bells on Sunday, or the Bible on the shelf calling to us like my kids calling up the stairs. But I'm not done doing what I'm busy doing – sleeping, working, talking, playing, vacationing, you name it. Can't this wait until later? until tomorrow?

We need to use the pause button! Jesus wants to bring you rest! He puts the synagogue ruler to shame and our excuses as well, "*You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?*"

In modern-day terms, "You wake up on your day off, and you want to sleep in, but your dog needs to go for a walk. That dog will not wait until tomorrow! Don't you get up and let it out and give it water and food? So why should I wait, when I see not a dog but a person who needs to be led away from Satan? This woman was bound by Satan for eighteen years—this can't wait until tomorrow!"

We're often better at putting off Jesus than we are putting off our pets, our task list, or our sleep. But today, *behold*, look through Jesus' eyes. He sees your heart, and how Satan wants to bind you again. Jesus sees how much difficulty you are facing in this world. He sees the sin at work in your heart and how helpless you are against it. And whenever he sees you, he knows: **This can't wait until tomorrow.** He wants to give you rest!

If you think that prioritizing time in God's house or time in his Word each day would mean missing out on this, that, or the other thing, or it will be too inconvenient—we'll be put to shame just like Jesus' adversaries were. But when Jesus breaks into your routine and does glorious things for you like he did here, you'll find that not only was it at just the right time for him to help you, but also just the right time for you to glorify him.

In the wizard of Oz, when the wizard tells them to come back tomorrow, Dorothy responds, "If you were really great and powerful, you'd keep your promises." The Wizard of Oz isn't great and powerful; he's a fraud. But Jesus is really great and powerful and he keeps his promises. So come back to him day after day, weekend after weekend. Pause and seek the rest that only he can give— forgiveness, life, and peace. And as you see opportunities to glorify him in return, you too, will say with hearts that can't wait to see Jesus, "**This can't wait until tomorrow!**" Amen.