

## Sermon

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Athelstone Uniting Church #171

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### Boundary-Breaking Love

**Bible Readings:** Psalm 71:1-6 NIV and Luke 13:10–17 NRSVUE

Niina marni!!

When we share in this Kurna greeting each week, we are honouring the first peoples of this place by using their language and greeting.

We are also asking a question:

Niina marni!! "Hello, are you good?" and the response: Marni'ai! "I'm good."

Or, as Uncle Ivan, local Kurna / Permangk elder explains it: Are you good / have you had enough to eat?

It's a way of asking, are you well / do you have all you need?

It's not just a greeting then.. it's a genuine enquiry about the needs of another. "Are you OK?"

I have read that John Wesley would begin small group meetings with the question "How is it with your soul?"

It really is getting deep into asking, 'how are you?'<sup>1</sup>

It's about showing care and interest in others in our community – and being ready to listen for their response ... to really listen!

Because, in reality, most of the time when we ask, the answer is usually something standard, like "I'm well" or "I'm OK."

Jesus teaches us to care for the wellbeing of others – and to notice, to really notice when someone is in need.

One day, Jesus was in the synagogue, he was busy teaching from the Scriptures. And a woman appeared..

The people watched as Jesus paused from his teaching, having seen this woman, called her over and healed her.

The leader of the synagogue was not happy. This was on the day of Sabbath, and to his understanding, to heal someone was to break a rule – a very important rule! Couldn't this happen on another day?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ministrymatters.com/lead/entry/7571/how-is-it-with-your-soul>

But Jesus, the Lord, answered, challenging the way rules were kept and calling on the people gathered to reconsider the purpose of Sabbath.

So what was going on here?

The woman, for 18 years, had lived with this condition. Hunched over, great difficulty in seeing ahead, neck and back pain, fatigue, difficulty breathing, and, potentially, feelings of frustration, vulnerability, isolation. Unable to fully participate in life, most certainly seen as ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to participate in the worshipping life of the community.

Could Psalm 71 have been her prayer?

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me; turn your ear to me and save me.

Perhaps she had memories of days past when she had experienced God's faithfulness?

For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,  
my confidence since my youth.

From birth I have relied on you;

She had come to the synagogue, the place where the people felt closest to God, and on this special day, had an encounter with Jesus which restored her body to full health, and restored her back into the community she had been cut off from and she could do nothing but praise God for his faithfulness!

Jesus healed her physically *and* restored her to the community – by calling her a daughter of Abraham – claiming back her place. Not only that, the community itself was restored by having her back as part of it. Whole.

Then we have the Jewish leader:

He wanted to please God by doing the right thing. He wanted to honour the Sabbath, which was such an important day. For many, the most important day of the week, the most important holy day.

To keep the Sabbath was to honour the pattern that God set right back in Genesis, when God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. The 7<sup>th</sup> day was blessed and God rested from all he had done in creation.

Sabbath keeping is a good and healthy thing to do. To rest and to be thankful. To regularly take time out is good for our body, minds and souls.

To keep the Sabbath was also a time of remembering. This verse was crucial from Deuteronomy 5:

<sup>15</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.  
(Deuteronomy 5:15 NRSVUE)

To keep the Sabbath was to be thankful that God brought the Israelites out of slavery into freedom.

Sabbath keeping was, and continues to be, about rest, celebrating freedom and giving thanks.

The rules said that one was not to work on the Sabbath. There were many things that constituted 'work'. It wasn't really clear if healing was one of them. Certainly, saving a life was essential. But was healing, work? This caused much debate. For this Jewish leader it was considered work. So for him, Sabbath was damaged. And he would have felt that this was deeply dishonouring of God.

However, the way I read it, I don't think Jesus was trying to damage or disrespect the Sabbath. I think he was helping the people re-frame how they understood the Sabbath.

In the newsletter this week, I asked if you can think back to the last time you did some colouring in.

We offer colouring most weeks in our creative space – not just a childhood activity, it can be used as an effective mindfulness exercise for focussing and calming our minds.

Colouring-in pages have a black sketch of a picture, which we bring to life by adding colour.

From a young age we would have been encouraged to colour within the lines and not colour over the lines.

Some of us want to colour in neatly and precisely within the lines, whilst others don't mind if a few strokes wonder off outside the guidelines.

There are times when colouring over and beyond the lines can be a beautiful thing.

I think that's what Jesus did. Jewish Torah provided rules for living, law which had lost some of its meaning and intent over time.

Jesus came to help us see that there are times when those lines can be coloured over – especially for the sake of freedom!

Jesus, according to the gospel of Luke, was passionate about freedom and justice. He wanted to set people free from those things that held them back from living their lives. Able to flourish, as God had intended for them to live.

Back in Luke 4, Jesus was in another synagogue in Nazareth and had read words from the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, *he read*,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set free those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup> after that, he rolled up the scroll he had been reading from, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue had been fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he said to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21 NRSVUE)

Jesus had come to proclaim release to the captives and to set free those who are oppressed

These themes were not unfamiliar to those in the synagogue that day: those words of Isaiah, the words I quoted earlier from Deuteronomy which were so important to Sabbath keeping, and the words of Amos:

"let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."  
(Amos 5:4)

Jesus, through his teaching and healing, by colouring over the lines, was living out, embodying, the good news which the people were longing for. He was releasing people from the things that kept them captive.

Jesus broke those rules, or at least, challenged them, to restore, liberate, set free, and enable fullness of life.

Was he demonstrating then, that the Sabbath can also be about setting people free, as a way of honouring and continuing the good work that God has been doing?

God's kingdom is breaking through. We can't wait til tomorrow to set people free!

This woman appeared in the synagogue.. and Jesus noticed her...

How often do we miss moments like this? Moments when we could pause to ask how someone is, and listen to the response, and perhaps even follow up with support or prayer?

I have to confess to you, that since returning from Long Service Leave, I have missed a few opportunities! Taking a break for such a long time during Long Service Leave was a little like stepping off a train for a while. The train continued on down the track, while I paused for a rest at the station. Later, I made my way to another station further up the track where I jumped back onto the moving train! I then needed to try to catch up with you and the work I need to do while that train kept on going! I've been a tad tired and overwhelmed! I don't know if that image makes sense to you, but it's been a full few weeks as I've tried to keep up.

In the midst of that I know I have missed opportunities to stop and check in with people. One day last week, on reflection that evening, I remembered 3 times when I could have asked some deeper questions about how people are doing, but missed the opportunity. All I can do is confess, learn from it and move on. Next time, I hope I will be better able to be in the moment and listen more deeply.

Who is God calling you to notice today? Whether here in this space, or someone else in your life? Who is caught in some form of bondage, where they cannot live as God intended.. where they are not able to flourish?

Whether they are tired or stressed, overwhelmed by life, ill, suffering from a chronic physical or mental health condition, burdened by grief, excluded for being 'different'..

Perhaps there are those who are bound or held back by unjust rules and practices?

Whoever they are, picture them in your mind right now, if you can.

Pray that God will give you insight so that you can understand what might freedom from bondage could look like for them?

Picture them released and free from their burdens. Free to flourish. Free to praise God. Free to live their best life.

Pray that God will give you insight into what to pray for..

*(silence)*

This week, let us reflect and pray about how we can celebrate the worth found in all people and recognize the place of all within our community.

May we be a people who notices, and asks... Are you OK? *And* are ready to listen for the response *and* seek ways to respond with love, grace and compassion.

Amen