

A Sabbath Healing



Luke 13:10-17

Year C Proper 16 (Revised)

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	Husband - a man whose mother-in-law has been disabled for 18 years	▲				▲
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		●		
▲	Wife - a woman whose mother has been disabled for 18 years	▲				●
■	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	●	▲			■
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲	▲		
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲	●		
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		▲	▲		
●	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		●	●		
■	Leader of the synagogue - a religious leader who is willing to bend a few rules for the good of the synagogue and the people it serves			■	▲	
●	Man #1 - an easily swayed member of the synagogue				●	
●	Man #1 - an easily swayed member of the synagogue				▲	
■	Jesus				▲	■
●	Man #1 - an easily swayed member of the synagogue				●	
●	Man #1 - an easily swayed member of the synagogue				▲	

Scene 1

Husband , John , Matthew , Wife

{Matthew and a couple of other disciples are sitting in a synagogue listening to Jesus preach, when a couple approaches them.}

Husband Sir? Excuse me. Sir?

John Yes?

Wife We've heard that your rabbi is also a healer. Is this true?

John Absolutely.

Husband My wife's mother has been unable to walk for the past eighteen years, but we brought her here today - she's right over there in the front row - hoping that your rabbi could look at her.

Wife We're not looking for a miracle. We know he's busy, and we know she's probably beyond help, but we had to try.

John Of course. The rabbi has never turned away anyone who needed his help, and based on our past experiences, I can tell you that you *will* get your miracle!

Matthew *[jumping in]* But not today, naturally.

Husband Of course. We understand.

Matthew Tomorrow, or any other day this week.

Husband Certainly. We wouldn't want to do this the wrong way.

Wife We didn't know how long you'd be in town, so we came right out as soon as we heard you were here, but of course, we can come back any day.

John We'll be sure to set aside time for people to come to the rabbi for healing tomorrow. You'll be the first.

Husband Thank you! I can't tell you how grateful we are.

Wife Thank you! Thank you so much!

{They exit.}

John Thanks, Matthew. I forgot about...you know.

Matthew If this was the only day we were going to be here, I would't have sent them away.

John No, of course not. You did right. But we'd better make sure James schedules some time for healing tomorrow.

Matthew I'll go tell him now.

Scene 2

James , Judas , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

{Outside the synagogue, the disciples manage the crowd that continues to gather, hoping for a chance to hear Jesus preach.}

James *[to a man in the crowd]* Sorry, sir, but you'll have to wait. The place is packed.

Peter Don't worry! When they're done in there, you can go in next. The rabbi will preach the same sermon again.

Judas *[to the crowd]* In the meantime, if anyone would like to donate to our cause while you wait, I can accept your contributions.

Phillip Everything we collect is being split with the synagogue, right?

Judas That's right. *[to the crowd]* All donations collected either inside or out here are being divided between the synagogue and our ministry, so give now! You don't have to wait until you get inside.

Matthew *[to Peter and James]* The rabbi is going to preach multiple sermons?

James Yeah, we have an agreement with the synagogue that he can continue preaching as long as there are people who still want to hear him.

Matthew *[doubtfully]* I see...

Peter You have a problem with that?

Matthew It could turn into work.

Peter Nonsense! The rabbi has the strength of ten men. He could preach for forty days straight without a break!

Judas I don't think that's what Matthew's worried about.

James I know what it is, but don't worry, I already discussed it with the synagogue leader. No matter how much he preaches, it won't be considered a breach of the Sabbath.

Matthew [*incredulously*] No matter how much?

Phillip [*not understanding*] A breach of the Sabbath?

Judas The concern is that if he preaches too much, at some point, it'll qualify as work.

Peter Talk is work? *Work* is work.

Matthew [*seriously*] But that's not what most scholars say. They debate where the line is, but there *is* a line. [*to James*] How can you ignore it?

James Well, it's not just me. It's also the leader of the synagogue. You know: the guy whose job it is to teach people where the line is?

Matthew He's also the guy whose job it is to raise money for the synagogue.

Peter What are you saying?

Judas [*trying to head off an argument*] Matthew! You don't want to say it.

Phillip Hey, come on, guys, what's happening here?

Matthew [*insistently*] If there were no money at stake, you'd both care more about whether we're violating the Sabbath!

Peter Aren't we doing away with all that Sabbath stuff, anyway?

James [*seizing on the point*] Exactly! We're bringing in a new religion of the spirit, and doing away with the dead letter of the law.

Matthew The rabbi has said he came to *fulfill* the law, not abolish it.

James Look, we're *not* violating the Sabbath in the first place, so there's nothing to talk about. And who are you, anyway -

Judas [*in an urgent whisper*] Hey, keep it down! Both of you! This is neither the time nor the place.

Phillip [*from near the entrance to the synagogue*] Uh, guys?

Matthew *[angrily]* It's all about appearances, isn't it? You don't really care about the Sabbath. Hypocrite!

Scene 3

James , John , Judas , Leader , Peter , Phillip

{Inside the synagogue, Jesus is standing before the crowd, which is loudly arguing among itself. The synagogue leader frantically works his way toward the disciples.}

Judas What happened?

Phillip The rabbi just healed an old woman.

Peter Why's the crowd so upset? Shouldn't they be cheering?

John They did at first, but then someone shouted that he'd broken the Sabbath, and this big argument broke out.

James Ugh. The Sabbath again!

{The leader of the synagogue finally reaches the group and bears down on James.}

Leader What are you trying to do, ruin this synagogue's reputation? We had a deal! We had an understanding!

James I'm sorry! I was outside. I didn't realize he was going to do a healing!

Peter The rabbi just performed a miracle in your synagogue. Shouldn't you be happy?

Leader He performed a miracle on the Sabbath! The Sabbath! Do you know what kind of trouble that can bring us?

Judas *[trying to be reasonable]* But if preaching the same sermon over and over all day today wasn't going to be considered work, how could one quick healing be? I mean, I didn't see it, but I assume it was pretty effortless. It usually is.

Leader *[refusing to be placated]* That's not the point! It's not just about breaking a sweat. It's about categories of activities, about what people perceive to be work.

Phillip *[remembering what Matthew said]* You mean, appearances?

Leader Yes! Ten minutes ago, there wasn't so much as a whisper of a doubt in the people's minds about the preaching. But now listen to them! They're questioning everything! All it took was the planting of a single doubt.

James Look, we don't disagree with you. We're sorry! We wouldn't have let this happen if we had suspected our rabbi was going to try it. It's our fault for not making it clear to him beforehand. We should have anticipated.

Leader [*somewhat mollified*] Well, all right. I suppose everybody acted in good faith. The thing is, I would have been happy to have him come and do his healing any other day of the week! But now...

Judas But now...?

Leader I'm sorry, but I think I'm going to have to terminate this engagement. I just can't see how we can go on now. I'm going to have to reprimand your rabbi publicly, and then you're going to have to go. Come by my office before you leave and we'll split the donations up to this point.

Scene 4

Jesus , Leader , Man #1 , Man #2 , Man #3 , Man #4

{The crowd continues to harangue Jesus.}

Man #1 You broke God's law!

Man #2 You have no respect for our customs. I was warned about you!

Man #1 Those people are just as guilty! This is a place of worship, not a doctor's office!

Man #2 They should be reported to the authorities, right along with you!

Jesus Hypocrites!

{The crowd is stunned into silence.}

Jesus How many of you untie your oxen and donkeys on the Sabbath so they can be watered? How much more should this woman, this daughter of Israel who has suffered for eighteen years, be loosened from her bonds on this day?

Man #3 He's right! The Sabbath is the *best* day for healing!

Man #4 When our property is at stake, we work on the Sabbath, but when it isn't, we don't care if an old woman remains crippled!

Leader No! It's not a fair comparison! Some things need to be done every day. If you didn't water your animals, they'd get sick! But the woman could have been healed the very next day, or any day after that. If she'd been sick for eighteen years, she wasn't going to die tomorrow!

Man #3 You're a hypocrite, just like the rabbi said! You care more about the letter of the law than about the welfare of the people!

Man #4 I'll be looking for a new synagogue to attend. I don't care if I have to walk five miles to get there.

Leader *[desperately trying to salvage the situation]* Wait, I do care about the law, but I also care about the people I serve. And I see that you're right. The rabbi here is right. We mustn't let an overly strict interpretation of the law prevent us from doing good. *[to Jesus]* Please, stay and continue your preaching and your healing.

{The crowd roars in approval.}

Man #1 Here, here!

Man #2 That's right. We take back what we said before.

Man #1 Please stay, rabbi. Who cares about the Sabbath?

Man #2 That's right. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
[the whole crowd, read by everybody in group except Jesus, begins to chant]

everybody The Sabbath made for man!
The Sabbath made for man!
The Sabbath made for man!
The Sabbath made for man!

Jesus *[sternly interrupting their chant]* Hear, O Israel!

{The crowd goes silent.}

Jesus *[sternly, almost angrily]* The Lord your God is one God! And thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul! So say the first four

commandments given to Moses who led our forebearers out of captivity and into freedom. And the next commandment is this: Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy!

{He turns and walks away.}

Scene 5

Husband , Jesus , Matthew , Wife

{After the day's events are finally over, Matthew seeks out the couple whose mother was healed.}

Husband Thank you!

Wife Thank you so much!

Matthew You're very welcome. But I thought you were going to come back tomorrow.

Husband We were, but as we were leaving, my wife's mother began calling out for help, for someone to help her today, that moment, and your rabbi called us up.

Wife We're sorry for the trouble we caused.

Matthew No, no, it's all right. *[half to himself]* It's obviously all right, since the rabbi did it.

{Jesus enters}

Husband Sir! Thank you again for what you did. We owe you a debt we can never repay.

Wife We're sorry that it led to trouble for you. We would have been happy to come back tomorrow.

Jesus You caused me no trouble. Healing your mother was hardly any work at all.

Matthew Rabbi, I apologize. I was wrong about the Sabbath. They came to me before and I told them to come back tomorrow. I was wrong. James and the others, everybody else was right, and I was wrong.

Jesus So, you divide everybody into two sides and place yourself all alone on the wrong side?

Matthew Well, I don't think anybody else was as sure as I was that you shouldn't be healing on the Sabbath. The crowd at first, but they came around. I even had my doubts about all the preaching.

Jesus If you must divide the characters in today's little drama into two groups so you can draw some kind of lesson from the contrast, here's how I'd do it. On one side: James, the synagogue leader, the woman I healed, and maybe Judas and most of the crowd. On the other side: me, these good people here...and you.

Wife I apologize again for my mother!

Husband We tried to get her out of there. We explained that we would come back first thing tomorrow morning, but she wouldn't listen.

Jesus There's no need to apologize. Your mother did nothing wrong. It was perfectly right for someone in her condition to care only about her own healing. I would expect her to break every law of God or man if that's what it took to get my attention!

Matthew Were we in the wrong, then? How could *you* be in the wrong?

Jesus I was not. We were not.

Matthew Then the other side was? But you already said their mother wasn't.

Jesus She was not. Nor were any of the others.

Matthew But one side had to be wrong! And how could you and I even be on the same side when I thought it would be wrong to heal on the Sabbath but you did it?

Jesus Why does it matter? Isn't it enough for you that I say we were on the same side and that you did no wrong?

Matthew Right and wrong matter, no matter how things turn out. If I was wrong, I want to understand why. If I was right, I want to understand that, too.

Jesus *[with great pleasure]* Behold! A man who cares about the truth of things!

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at

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