My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Have you ever heard of the author C.S. Lewis? What books have you read of his? (take all answers). He writes a couple of different genres to describe our struggles with ethics and morals, light and darkness, life and death, grief and joy, seemingly always these opposites which vie for our attention and our souls and making us wrestle with the uncomfortable middle space between two competing states of being.

 Well, he also wrote science fiction, a series called The Space Trilogy. In these books he describes the protagonist, Dr. Ransom, who is abducted by aliens and taken from earth to a distant planet. Ransom at one point has to describe to these other-worldly beings what sin is. How would we describe it? C’mon, the heatwave is over, this is the summertime interactive part of worship to see if we’re still awake (take all answers).

Those are all good. Dr. Ransom finally settles on the word “bent”. In that, he further defines it as that we end up being mis-shapen, not the way we were made to be, and not fit for our intended purpose. We’re all bent aren’t we? My father in his waning days spent most of his time looking at the ground, literally bent over. Many of us are simply out of shape, suffering from some malady or another that causes us to have a limp here or a droop there, or, if you’re like me, just don’t stand up straight all that often, because the older I get the more my spinal stenosis kicks in and reminds me that it’s painful to raise up to my full height. Most of us are simply not able to carry ourselves as God created and intended us.

Now, Luke’s story tells us that the woman is not only bent over but also “bound”. Jesus’ main action in this story is to untie the bound; when challenged, he asks that if livestock can be untied in order to remain alive, then why cannot the woman also be untied and set free? Indeed, in the first few verses Jesus commands that she be “set free” to set her free from her infirmity. Now, words like “bondage” have overtones of captivity, racial and otherwise, that are beyond our sermon today.

Jesus identifies the cause of the woman’s bent shape as a bondage of spirit, and thus, soul. But we also find out that the ruler of the synagogue is also enslaved, bent by another spirit that relies on a false sense of piety that mis-shapes him. He is the leader and oppressor, for sure; but he, too, is also a victim of those spirits which keep us bent, and not fit for our intended purpose, not the way we were made to be.

The woman is set free; but what about the leader? We can all recognize demons that drown people in their own power struggles, ego battles, and addictive behaviors and patterns that can destroy life in a desperate search to relieve life’s aches of the heart, body, and spirit. We understand how depression and anxiety can ensnare us in a cycle of shame and guilt that quickly turns to self-loathing. But we should also understand that there are weights of perfection and pride that bend us out of shape, making us creatures that seek to have God’s image serve our purposes rather than the other way around.

I think we need to be careful, as we move about in the world but also encounter those new to our faith, that we don’t get all self-righteous about our certitude with God or having saved ourselves from ourselves. We too should be seeing ourselves through each of these characters, and that we also need to be untied by Jesus this day.

Let’s also notice one other thing going on here. The woman in the story does not seek out Jesus for healing. Jesus seeks HER out, and calls HER over. Jesus unties her and sets her free because he chooses for her to be free from bondage of these spirits that bend us out of shape. God is doing this for all of humankind through Jesus’ actions here; God doesn’t wait for us to understand our bent shape. God comes to us in the depths of our being bent further and further by the world, until we can only look downcast, and we can no longer look forward to the future, or upward to the heavens.

God comes and even experiences our bent-ness on the cross, the abject cruelty of being abused and killed. And yet, God also renders even that ultimate act of trying to kill God’s love powerless, just as the political leaders and power brokers seemed more intent than ever to hold onto it.

Even the ruler of the synagogue and his opponents were shamed, says the text. The people see this for what it is; they see themselves as untied and freed. But what about the ruler? Will he recognize that the woman’s liberation on the Sabbath was his as well?

Luke does it to us again. He doesn’t finish the story. What do we think? I’ll leave you my final thoughts.

What is our Sabbath Day for? If you believe our political leaders and power brokers, it’s for shopping and sports betting. “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, O Lord”, might be the response we most want to give in our heart of hearts. And it’s out of that longing that we have Sabbath. But is it deeper than that? Is Sabbath transformational? Does God untie us and set us free, right here, right now? We do an awful lot of gathering, greeting, communing, and we talk of our commitment to God’s word and work. But are we each blessed, untied, set loose on the world, where as we have been untied we also work to untie those we encounter through God’s life-giving grace?

I’ll say this for my part. What weighs me down is probably less spinal stenosis than the weight of my giving into the world’s priorities and problems, and attempting to solve too much on my own rather than talking and hugging it out. I need to be in community to get unleashed each week, untied from my own self, and seeking God’s grace on the Sabbath.

The lasting part of this whole story is that we can be honest with our God. We can be honest about how we are bent and broken. We can be honest about the bondage that keeps us held back. We don’t have to hide; we are free to welcome God’s presence through Christ who sees us, like the woman, weighed down and not the way we were meant to be, not fit for our intended purpose.

Let us bid Christ’s presence into our lives more often, more wholly, and more fully, this day and each day. Thanks be to God, Amen.