



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Being made new on the Sabbath

Trinity 10

Sunday 24 August 2025

Luke 13.10-17

Bishop Adam

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¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.'

¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?

¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?'

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Luke 13.10-17

'He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath ... the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath ... said come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day ... hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey ... ought not this woman be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' records St Luke, quoting Jesus.

'If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable ... I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth' says God through the prophet Isaiah.

Refrain from trampling the sabbath. You might know the ten commandments. They include 'You shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony'... doing well today? But there's the fourth commandment which starts like this:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 6 days you shall labour and do all your work, but the 7th day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work."

Now, I know you have jobs to do. We still need to untie our oxen or feed our children or visit our elderly in need. There's church as well.

But though I'm a Bishop I don't want to talk much about church. I'm really talking about sabbath as a 24 hour stretch in the other 7x24 hours. One day in seven that is set aside for you, your family and friends, your church. But it is also for the good of the world and for God. A day which is to reflect the peace of heaven.

Today in Essex and East London, where and when so many other people are on holiday, is a good time to plan our next holiday. Ever have that conversation? As the holiday comes to a close you say 'this has been good hasn't it? Let's plan the next one now'. From the perspective of peace and rest - which I hope you have had or will have or are having - to agree on the next place of rest.

Whether or not you are holidayed the good news is that your next one is not far away. In fact it is no more than 7 days away. The weekend, even a day off from labour is part of our Christian heritage - it came along quite late in this country, despite it being there in the 10 Commandments all along. A day when workers were not wage slaves, but free.

I want to reframe the discussion about sabbath as a rather Victorian obligation and instead say this: it is part of God's revolution to make all things new on earth.

It is a matter of justice for others, wholeness for ourselves and worship for God. It is just what we all need because it is given to us as a gift a 'holy day'. A holiday. Here are some things we can do with sabbath and some reasons to notice it afresh:

The sabbath is good for you. You know you need rest. If you can't fix it in your calendar then let God do it. He wants what is good for you. He wants you to flourish. What might you do on one day, in contrast to the other six, that is good for you. A day that is, in the words of Isaiah, 'a delight'? A walk, a lie-in, a time of solitude, a lengthy meal, a book?

The sabbath is also good for friends and family. I'm generally working in a Sunday, so my sabbath tends to be 24 hours from Friday evening. We start by putting a new tablecloth on the table and preparing a more special meal than at other times.

My own marker is to play opera very loudly while I'm cooking. That and hopefully the smells from the kitchen tell anyone in the house that a meal together is on its way. Our children are grown up but we may have one of them, sometimes friends, other guests over a meal to bring restoration to all as we share the love language of time.

The sabbath is good for your church. I don't mean wearing a hat and Sunday best to pretend to others in the pews that you enjoyed listening to the bearded Bishop bang on.

I know of a young woman who was wondering what she could do to care for the children in her church, especially those who are in some way vulnerable. She was not in a position to do the caring directly herself but she identified she had a role to turn up regularly and smile and be a positive and regular presence in the lives of those children in her church community. You may not get much from the sermon or feel much at Communion but by turning up consistently you are helping build up those around you.

The sabbath is good for the world. One writer describes the sabbath as 'resistance'. The commandment goes on: "the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns" - us and those around us.

We are all squeezed into the mould of the world. You and I are regularly forced into being consumers and producers. Advertising and marketing make it easy for us to be bent into that shape. It's their job, but they bombard us! Unless we notice this – for ourselves and our neighbours - this can diminish our us. We can end up as slaves or animals or machines in the name of the economy and of work.

Resist? We know constant use of the smartphone reduces concentration and challenges mental health. How about once per week don't look at your phone for 24 whole hours?

Of course some of us do work on a Sunday, but the principle stands. One pattern of 24 hours that is different to the rest of the week in serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs as Isaiah says. Lets face it, we at least know our natural environment could do with a break once a week. Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly. One day of focus to help creation back into the shape it was purposed - that's Sabbath.

Finally, the sabbath is good for God. 'You shall take delight in the LORD' on the sabbath. And as we do that He loves it because he wants us, he desires our company, he created us to know and to love him – for our relationship to be made whole. When we do delight in Him, as we worship, we all find that the sabbath is good.

But there's a problem with all this, because it could seem that not trampling on, keeping the sabbath is dependent on us. But please don't hear this as just good advice. No friends, instead, this is where we can skip out of church with the lightness that come from good news.

Because by our own behaviour there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make him love us less. This sabbath, take to heart the simple truth that as you come to Him, repent and believe the good news, your salvation is assured.

To you, bent out of shape by the world, the flesh and the devil, He calls you over and says, 'you are set free from your ailment.'

For the only one who truly kept our side of the promise was himself trampled on. Jesus, killed as the Friday evening Passover lamb but rose again on Sunday. His cross and resurrection is the place of life. He kept the law and He is the lord of the sabbath.

Jesus Christ offers not just 24 hours to us as a gift that is good for us, he offers himself as the means for life to the fullness today, our next holiday and for eternity.

*Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever, Amen*