***“What’s In A Name?”***

*a sermon delivered by the Rev. Scott Dalgarno on July 27, 2025*

*based on Luke 13:10-17*

In the Prologue to her book, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying,* Emily Bazelon writes, *When I was in eighth grade, my friends fired me.”*

She discusses how common this is in Middle School and in doing so tells the story of a new friend she got as a result of the fallout after being shabbily treated by other kids. Her new friend’s name was Allie.

*Allie had been close friends with two girls, Heather and Lucy, who, in the span of one summer, had grown into tall and beautiful sirens, and knew it. Suddenly they had the attention of every boy they beckoned . . . Heather and Lucy, newly emboldened, decided to drop Allie much as my friends had dropped me – only they didn’t stop there. Because they had status, they could really make Allie suffer. When they started calling her “squid,” as in nerd, everyone began calling her squid. Never mind that we went to a progressive Quaker school. In eighth grade, good grades were social death. They sat behind her in assembly and threw bits of paper in her hair and laughed. Some of the popular boys joined in, too, one-upping each other in their efforts to make Allie miserable – and to prove their allegiance to Heather and Lucy.*

Anne Lamott has said that when the Bible speaks of “hell” or “the pit,” it’s really talking about Middle School. You don’t need to be a Bible scholar to agree.

So, did anyone have names like that for you when you were young? Names that got under your skin, or made you cry?

Today's gospel story has come to be called the story of "the Bent woman."

Now, with the name, Squid, in mind, think about that name. How would you like to have been immortalized in scripture for all time and be known as “the bent-over woman?”

Maybe she had osteoporosis or degenerative disc disease. I imagine that when people saw her coming down the street they did not say, "Oh, here comes Miriam,” or “Here comes Marjorie.” No, they saw her creeping down the street, body bent, eyes glued to the ground, and they said, "Here comes that bent over woman – or, "Here comes our poor crippled-up, neighbor lady. I sure hope I never look like that."

That was the name they gave her, and they gave it to her for life.

Today we are more thoughtful, right? We don't call people crippled anymore. We used to say they were handicapped. Now we are more likely to say they have a disability, or they have special needs, or they are challenged in some way.

Back in 2015 our president, at a campaign rally, made fun of Serge Kovaleski, a journalist with a congenital disability who shook when he spoke. When I saw a video of him mocking that man I thought he’d have no chance of being elected. We were a nation of people who wouldn’t stand for that. I was wrong. I was naïve.

Well, contrary to the way the political wind is blowing in our country, I believe Jesus would still have us behave decently, still have us do our best to be respectful of others, especially those with grave challenges to face every day.

In this morning’s healing story we see how important is his concern that we be careful of any kind of naming or labeling we might take part in, or tacitly sanction. So, let's look at the story more closely.

*There appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*

*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."*

*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? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who was bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

To Jesus, she isn't just some bent woman, some tragic case, some sad victim. Jesus doesn't even call her by her name here. No, he calls her a “daughter of Abraham.”

Now, it may sound a little formal, but it is, in fact, the most complimentary name he could give her. Remember, Abraham was the great grandfather of Israel; the one who, on a starry night, God promised to make a father of a great nation.

He was told he would have children as many as the stars in the sky, and the sand particles on the seashore.

Yes, and those children, those sons and daughters, were meant to be God’s means of blessing the whole world. THAT'S who this woman is to Jesus, and THAT is who he wants everyone to see when they look her way. Not a cripple; not just physically challenged either, as respectful as that may be.

She is more than any name short of a chosen and commissioned child of God; she is part of God's great plan for the world. Bent over, straight up, or tied in knots, she is something special, and we don't even know what her given name is.

Here is something Frederick Bueckner once wrote about *his* own name, and in discussing his name here, he discusses all of our names.

*“‘[Bueckner] is my name. If somebody mispronounces it in some foolish way,*

*I have the feeling that what’s foolish is me. If somebody forgets it, I feel that it is I who am forgotten. There’s something about it that embarrasses me in just the same way that there’s something about me that embarrasses me.*

*I can’t imagine myself with any other name: Held, say, or Merrill, or Hlavacek. If my name were different, I would be different.*

*When I tell somebody my name, I have given him a hold over me that he didn’t have before. If he calls it out, I stop, look, and listen whether I want to or not. In the Book of Exodus, God tells Moses that his name is Yahweh, and God hasn’t had a peaceful moment since.”*

Names and labels are a very important theme in the Bible. Naming goes on very early. In *Genesis*, Adam is created – but he is said to be lonely and in need of the company of "a creature corresponding to him." So God creates many creatures, one at a time.

Adam names each one: cow, horse, pig, sheep, anchovy. Now remember,

to name a thing is to say, “I've got your number.” And none of the creatures Adam names is recognized as aptly corresponding to Adam –

not even the Golden Retriever.

Finally, God creates woman. And Adam says, "That's it. That’s it! She’s the one.”

But she has no name to begin with. She is a mystery, which is a good thing.

Yes, and by *not* giving her a name he himself has picked out for her, it is clear that she has a purpose every bit as special as Adam’s. And that gives her two crucial things – it gives her *stature* and *agency.*

Now, when Jesus calls the bent woman by her true name, "Daughter of Abraham,” what happens? She stands upright. She is given stature, too.

And notice, he calls her this when the leader of the local synagogue takes him to task for healing on the Sabbath day. I love the exchange between Jesus and this fellow.

*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.”*

He’s kind of huffy. “Hey, we’re closed on Sunday. Blind, Lame, Go away.”

*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?*

We think, “You go, Jesus! There they go, those religious authorities, once again jumping on Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. I mean, who needs the Sabbath; that old out dated Jewish thing?”

But, hey, hold on; let's be careful about dismissing the Sabbath. It is a concept which is essential to Judaism being a living faith. Now it's true: in Jesus day there were 1521 things that a person was not supposed to do on the Sabbath; a 24 hour period of time which lasted from dusk on Friday until one could discern three distinct stars in the sky on Saturday evening.

Among those 1521 things are -- lighting a fire, putting in one's false teeth,

and saving a drowning man. So what does Sabbath essentially mean?

Some will answer, "Well, that's the day we rest, right ? -- so we can get energy for the rest of the week?

Well, yes and no. Sabbath has two clear purposes.

Its first meaning is to *stop*. SABBATH (or *Shabbat*) literally means, STOP.

You stop so that you can look back and see what you did all those other days, and have the where-with-all to appreciate it.

In the *Book of Exodus* the people wander in the wilderness for forty years.

To get them by, God gives them something called *manna* to eat.

God says, "Six days shall you gather it, morning and evening, but on the seventh day you shall STOP." This is first mention of *Sabbath* before it comes up as one of the 10 commandments.

To give the command integrity, we remember that God first practiced what God preached. Tradition teaches that God worked hard, creating the world in six days, and then God stopped, and on the seventh God looked at all God created and God said, "That's pretty good, if I do say so myself."

Well, "good" doesn't exactly express it. It’s more like, “That's fabulous, or

“That’s totally awesome!”

Secondly, and most importantly, God wants us to stop on the seventh day because if we don't stop periodically, our lives become down-right toxic.

A wonderful Biblical interpreter I asked to speak to this church at an Adult Education event three years ago, Ched Meyers, has said …

"That which we do 7 days a week without stopping, we soon begin to do,

*not* because we want to do it, but by compulsion.”

It becomes a sick habit; and that which we find ourselves doing as a sick habit, becomes nothing more than an addiction.

Speaking of that kind of compulsion, let me say this. Over the last few years I’ve read a number of articles and essays that detail the style of life lived by “20 and 30 somethings” in the various silicon valleys still cropping up in America.

These are places where people go to work on what are called campuses.

The young worker bees in those places sometimes live in group houses with other employees who often work 16 -18 hour days in front of computer screens.

Some eat junk food, others live on Kale chips – a lot of both is provided by the company’s maximum leader, whoever that is, to encourage them NOT to leave the campus very often.

Their lives amount to work, episodes of the latest popular steaming series on TV, occasional trips to Costco, and maybe a dive bar or two.

These are bright people who start out being giddy that they got a well-paying job so quickly out of college, a job that it is located in an ideal world --- to realizing that they have no life to speak of and never will, as long as they stay in a place designed to keep them children forever and discourage any long term meaningful relationships or meaningful life.

At such places there is usually no Sabbath. If there were, there might be the danger that the employees might reflect on their lives. And, of course, if they begin to reflect they might consider escaping.

It has been said that over the last 20 years, people in this country have added an average of one extra month of work per year to their schedules. Go figure.

So, the point here is simple. To create a life with a Sabbath in it, is to live a life worth living; a life lived beyond mere compulsion.

Yes, and if we don't have Sabbath (stopping) in our lives, we will become like all the bent over women and men in the world whose lives amount to no more than the toil just in front of them; we will end up bent over, looking only at the ground, never getting the big picture of anything.

To live with Sabbath is to find a rhythm. Life can have little rhythm without it.

The way to find that rhythm is to set a day apart. It is to intentionally choose NOT to do the things that *drive* you every other day of the week.

I have a rabbi friend who says that every Friday afternoon he feels his body begin to slow down quite naturally. That’s the rhythm we’re looking for here.

Barbara Brown Taylor, who I often quote, gave a talk on this subject some years ago here in Portland and I was able to attend. She spoke of a friend of hers named David whom she had gone to high school with in Georgia. David was the best basketball player ever to come out of her high school. Every year, he was the team high scorer and an all-state player.

When he graduated, they retired his jersey and number. Okay, yeah, that kind of thing happens all the time? Talent is talent. But what was truly remarkable about David was that each of the four years he played, he played only half the games. That was because games were played on Tuesday and Friday evenings, and because David was Jewish, he chose to observe the Friday night portion of Sabbath.

So, he played his heart out on Tuesday nights, and then on Friday evenings he put on his kippa and stayed home.

After the Friday game, win or lose, his teammates would come to David’s home and tell him and his family all the details of the game they had just played. He loved basketball, but he loved being a Jew on Friday nights even more.

He knew exactly who he was. What David had to give, he could only give one game out of two, but who would say it wasn’t enough? Fact was, it was more than any other kid in the high school gave, and that *wasn’t* because of his talent. It was because of his character. He was a son of Abraham.

And Jesus said, *Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who was bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?*

*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.*

***Amen***