

## **Reflection for Pentecost XI, Year C**

*Jeremiah 1:4-10, Psalm 71:1-6, Hebrews 12:18-29, Luke 13:10-17*

Sunday, August 21st, 2022

### **The Sabbath and Healing**

*Nancy Wright-DeKuyper, Layreader, Christ Church*

*Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. (Exodus 20:8-10 part)*

The Sabbath is a weekly day of rest or time of worship given in the Bible as the seventh day. It is observed differently in Judaism and Christianity and is one of the Ten Commandments, also called the Decalogue, a set of biblical principles relating to ethics and worship that play a fundamental role in both religions.

Judaism observes the Sabbath ~ Shabbat in Hebrew ~ every week beginning at sunset on Friday evening and ending after dark on Saturday evening. Sabbath observance was a special sign between God and Israel: "The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested" (*Exodus 31:16-17*)

Since the Sabbath is a part of Old Testament Law, Christians were not required to keep it; rather the first day of the week, Sunday, known as the Lord's Day, is observed by Trinitarian Christian denominations as the weekly celebration of the risen Jesus. An exception is the Seventh-Day Adventists who observe the Sabbath on Saturday.

According to St. Paul, we are not obligated to follow the Mosaic Sabbath by resting, but are now free to follow Jesus by serving, and that each individual Christian should decide whether to observe a Sabbath rest. Quote: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." (*Romans 14:5*)

I would like to share a story of one man's Sabbath beliefs. Almost one hundred years ago, the world's eyes were on 'The Flying Scotsman', an Olympic sprinter named Eric Liddell.

Eric Liddell was the son of Scottish missionaries who raised him to be a devout Christian, and he always tried to put God first.

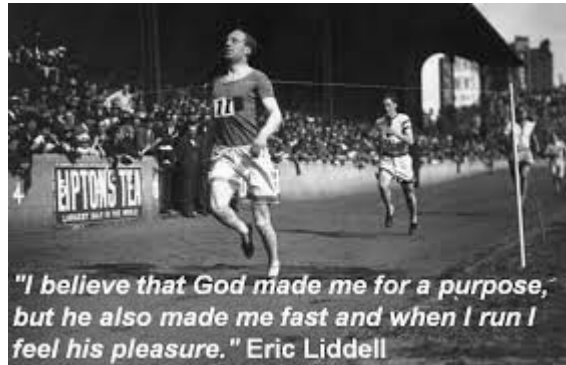
He earned the right to represent Great Britain at the 1924 Paris Olympics, and his best event, and the one everyone assumed he'd win easily, was the 100 metre sprint. However, he discovered months before the Olympics began that the qualifying heat for his race was on a Sunday—the day he believed to be the Sabbath.

Disappointed, yet bound by his faith, Liddell made the hard decision not to run, even though his victory in the most popular foot race in the world would have made him an even bigger national hero ~ the world's fastest man. Instead, he began training for the 400 metre race. As a result of his choice, the national press maligned him daily in their newspapers. He was mocked and ridiculed openly in public.

He received strong pressure from the British Olympic Committee to reverse his decision not to run.

However, four years of committed athletic training would not change Eric's higher commitment to keep the Fourth Commandment. He believed that honouring God was vastly more important than a footrace. As he said, "God made countries. God makes kings, and the rules by which they govern. And those rules say that the Sabbath is His. And I for one intend to keep it that way."

Though others could not understand the firmness and "inflexibility" of his faith, he stuck with his convictions and wasn't expected to even medal, but, amazingly he won the gold! He broke the Olympic and world records with a time of 47.6 seconds, a European record held for the next twelve years. Eric Liddell said, "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."



Eric Liddell's commitment to keep the Sabbath against tremendous peer pressure is inspiring and challenging to a world that is quick to excuse and set aside God's commandments when they are inconvenient to our own pursuits.

Our Gospel reading today has two themes: Sabbath prejudice and the healing of two cripples. The first cripple was the bent woman whom Jesus healed. The second cripple was the leader of the synagogue who was crippled by rigid man-made rules. The bent over woman deserved compassion and healing; she represents true faith and devotion to God.

The leader of the synagogue only cared about rules, doing things right with no room for compassion and mercy. He missed the heart of the Sabbath, the heart of God's law, the heart of tradition. St. Mark said, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

Professor Matthew Skinner writes, "The Sabbath, at its heart, offers a weekly reassertion of how much God values freedom and detests injustice...The original intention of the sabbath, according to Deuteronomy, is to provide relief, even if only temporary, from any system that would deny a person — or any part of creation — a share of rest, peace, wholeness, dignity, and justice. The synagogue official says, "Wait just one more day." Jesus answers, "No. The Sabbath is a pretty good day for setting people free. In fact, the purpose behind the Sabbath — the value God places on wholeness — *necessitates* that I do this now. We can't wait."

(*Why We Can't Wait*, Huffington Post, August 15, 2016)

Jesus healed out of compassion; it did not matter what day it was. God's Kingdom doesn't care about timing, sense of etiquette, what is proper or not. God cares about love. St. Paul said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Jesus argues in his defence, as New Testament Prof. Jeannine Brown writes, "If compassion is shown to one's animals on the Sabbath by providing them water, 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?" (13:16; *Commentary on Luke 13:10-17 Working Preacher*, August 22, 2010)

This healing story sums up, in a way, the whole of Jesus' message.

Jesus wants us to have life in its fullness, and sets out to free us from everything that holds us prisoners. By creating many laws that defined work, religious leaders made the Sabbath a burden instead of a blessing. Here, it is the distorted religiosity of the synagogue leaders, who insist that even healing needs to be regulated according to Sabbath law. Jesus attacks the absurdity of their arguments, and puts them to shame. *(Sacred Space)*

What was the difference between Eric Liddell refusing to run on a Sunday and Jesus healing on the Sabbath?

Liddell, on the one hand, was called to stand up against the excessive "godlessness" of 20th Century Western society where nothing was sacred. And Jesus, on the other hand, was called to stand up to the other extreme.



Was it simply that both were listening to God, and they did as God told them?

I would like to conclude today's homily by finishing Eric Liddell's story.

Eric Liddell returned to China in 1925 to serve as a missionary teacher. Aside from two furloughs in Scotland, he remained in China until his death in 1943 from an inoperable brain tumour, overwork, and malnutrition at the age of forty-three in a Japanese civilian internment camp.

Perhaps these words spoken by Eric Liddell in the drama, *Chariots of Fire*, a film based on his life, is something we can take away this morning and think about:

*You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It's hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul...And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within... If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race.*

And I will close with some of his most powerful words: *Each one of us is in a greater race than any I have run in Paris, and this race ends when God gives out the medals.*  
Amen.



**Further Reading:**

Sabbath Quotes from the Bible

[https://www.openbible.info/topics/the\\_sabbath\\_day](https://www.openbible.info/topics/the_sabbath_day)

Who Changed the Sabbath to Sunday? (<https://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/who-changed-the-sabbath>)

Losing Sabbath (<https://www.pointloma.edu/resources/theology-christian-ministry/losing-sabbath>)

The Decision That Made Olympic History (<https://www.tyndale.com/sites/readthearc/the-decision-that-made-olympic-history/>)

Why We Can't Wait ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-we-cant-wait\\_b\\_57adf4e4b03d06fe84a41e](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-we-cant-wait_b_57adf4e4b03d06fe84a41e))

COVID-19 Pandemic: What is the Sabbath? Finding Rest in a Time of Chaos (<https://get.tithe.ly/blog/what-is-the-sabbath-finding-rest-in-a-time-of-chaos>)

The Sabbath Day Or The Lord's Day – Which? By Dr. J. Vernon McGee

([https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mcgee\\_j\\_vernon/eBooks/sabbath-day-or-the-lords-day-which.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mcgee_j_vernon/eBooks/sabbath-day-or-the-lords-day-which.cfm))