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While Standing on One Foot

I think God would be more popular if religions didn't have so many rules.

We have the 10 commandments and the catechism, canons and creeds. We have lists of things you have to believe, and things you can and can't do. The Jews have 613 traditional laws called Mitzvot that come from the Torah; these include things like the dietary laws and the Sabbath laws, a few of which we run into in today's Scriptures.

But rules aren't restricted to religion. We have plenty of secular rules and morays as well – a whole new batch have been hitting us like a tsunami. Rules like refugees and asylees [may not get food assistance](#), or [trans athletes may not compete](#) in women's college sports. There are new rules against museums putting slavery [in such a negative light](#), and [rules against diversity, equity, inclusion and access](#) in governmental and private institutions. And many of those come with the blessing of religious institutions.

When our love of rule making causes us to harm, exclude, dehumanize, and invite attack, we codify our worst tendencies. We call the breaking of unjust rules Civil Disobedience.

In religious thought, it can be tempting to just toss all rules out and start over with something less demanding. Or reduce them all to something more basic. There is a story of a man who wanted to convert to Judaism, declaring that he would do so if a rabbi could teach him all of Torah while the man stood on one foot. He approached the great Rabbi Hillel with the request, and Hillel obliged saying “

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. (http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/689306/jewish/On-One-Foot.htm)

In our foolishness, we might spend a lifetime writing and rewriting new rules to follow. The wise Sage gives just one rule that takes a lifetime to practice.

And these are the kind of wise rules that surfaces in today's scriptures – not the kind that shape good behavior or put a new set of social norms in place, but the kind that shape a good life, a life that is so attuned to the will of God that it opens doors for God to do God's work.

Let's take a look at our reading from the 58th chapter of Isaiah. This author is writing after the people Israel have returned from their long captivity in Babylon. And they are a bit put out because they have kept their religious observances and God has not restored their ruined foundations and streets. So the

writer of this part of the book of Isaiah gives them something a bit richer than a set of rules to follow, he gives them a life practice. When you break it out it looks like this:

- Remove the yoke from those around you – that is lift oppression when you encounter it.
- Don't go around blaming other people.
- Don't say evil things.
- Feed those who are hungry, not just family members.
- Respond to the needs of those who suffer.

This is advice worthy of a good life coach. And Isaiah says do this and you'll get results: the depression will lift, the wounds from your family of origin will be healed, you'll be healthy and strong.

And then there's this: *You* will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

So this is not a personal life practice. It's a communal one. Do this and your community will be healed, lifted from its darkness, its streets restored.

Consider our own community, where homelessness and poverty can be so hidden away, and yet we know it's there. What comes to mind when you hear the phrases repair the breach and restore the streets to live in?

This is the daily practice that our Scriptures are calling us to.

And then Isaiah gets all churchy and starts talking about keeping the Sabbath. And he's in danger of losing his modern audience. He says things like honor the Sabbath, don't go about serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs on that day. Do I see squirming in those pews?

So how is this not a rule about going to church on Sunday? How is this a practice that changes the world, that repairs the breach and restores the streets around us?

It is. Because when you are in the realm of deep social healing, or human restoration, of reconciled streets and rebuilt neighborhoods you are in the realm of the will of God. And on the Sabbath, we do our best to put down our agendas and our personal beliefs, and enter into the communal experience of the presence of God.

On the Sabbath we rest in the way of God, we tune ourselves to the work that God is already doing. That is the power of gathering the people, telling the story and breaking the bread of God. It allows us to open the doors and let God's power out -- into our world.

And we have a great example of the empowerment that comes from truly honoring the God of the Sabbath in today's Gospel from Luke. So it's Saturday and Rabbi Jesus is teaching in the Synagogue. And there appears a woman who has a spirit that has left her bent over for 18 years. She doesn't ask for healing as happens in other stories. Jesus sees her and calls her over to him. And then he doesn't really do much, as he does in other healings. He just says "Woman you are set free of your ailment." He touches her. And then she stands up straight and praises God. And there is much rejoicing.

Jesus is so in-tune with God's desire to unbind this woman, that all it takes is a word about freedom and a touch from Jesus, and God does the work God was just waiting to do.

But the woman is not the only one who is bound by a spirit of impairment in this story. The leader of the Synagogue is tied up in Sabbath rules whose interpretation Rabbis have long haggled over. Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath if it could be done the other days of the week? And Rabbi Jesus points out that the laws against work on the Sabbath still allow people to water their animals, so why not this sister of theirs whose need is even greater?

Remove the yoke. Don't point the finger. Satisfy the needs of the afflicted.

Jesus knew his way around Isaiah and the Sabbath. Because he knew the way of his Abba God.

And so we too have our work cut out for us on this Sabbath, which invites us to step right into the breach that afflicts our world and help God to heal it. I'm aware that that is not easy work for a summer Sunday. To do it, we may have to allow God to unbind us from the things that keep us from the practice of love. We may have to invite God to dissolve the pride that turns our practice into a blunt set of standards with which we can blame others or deny them aid.

I believe that the liturgy has the power to do these things if we let it, with its quiet to still you. Its songs to soften you. The handshake and embrace of your neighbors to bring you peace. The broken body of Jesus to feed you and heal your own brokenness.

If we let it touch us and free us and help us stand up straight and praise God. The love it teaches us really not that complicated. We should be able to do it while standing on one foot. The rest as they say, is commentary.