

Jewish law prohibits doing any form of *melakhah* on Shabbat, unless an urgent human or medical need is life-threatening. Though *melakhah* is commonly translated as "work" in English, a better definition is "deliberate activity" or "skill and craftsmanship". There are 39 categories of prohibited activities. These include:

- scraping hide
- marking hide
- cutting hide to shape
- writing two or more letters
- erasing two or more letters
- building
- demolishing
- extinguishing a fire
- kindling a fire
- putting the finishing touch on an object, and
- transporting an object (between private and public domains, or over 4 cubits within public domain), though you could transport an object on the back of your hand, or a woman could hold and transport an object in the folds of her skirt.

The laws of Shabbat are strict. They are meant to create a day of celebration, and of prayer. Focus is on family, relationships, eating festive meals, avoiding talk of unpleasant things, like work or money. Focus is on God.

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but 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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

That is from Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but 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. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

That is from Exodus 20:8-11 New International Version (NIV)

“There are six days in which men ought to work”

That is from The Indignant Synagogue Leader in today’s Gospel story.

The synagogue leader holds a responsible and important position. He is in authority and needs to keep the rules, teach the rules, and be sure that people understand God’s will. That is a huge responsibility, and the job is to be taken

seriously. He has people's spiritual lives in his hands and is trying to uphold what he has learned through the scripture to be holy.

The scripture is very clear, the rabbi is not being foolish or dim-witted in his response to Jesus healing the woman in the synagogue.

The scripture tells us "there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years and she was bent over, and could in no way straighten herself up". Given the life expectancy of her time, that was probably half of her life.

Half her lifetime, staring at her feet. Seeing the changes in her feet. Orienting herself using just a dozen inches or so around her ankles. She would know others by their feet, see the changes in the seasons from the ground. Perhaps she saw her children's faces when they were little, but she could no longer look up at their faces. She could not look anyone in the eye. She could never look at the stars. She could see lots and lots of dirty feet, but never a person's smile.

But, the woman has had this "spirit of infirmity" for 18 years. Eighteen years. Nobody is travelling on the Sabbath, so Jesus would be seeing her again the next day. Why not wait another day? Why not observe the Sabbath rules, be a good role model, and not upset anyone?

Why not wait another day? Because it is a Godly thing to help people in need. Why break the rules? Because sometimes it is the right thing to do.

So when Jesus saw a woman who had suffered for 18 years with this chronic arthritis, or whatever it was, and he decided that relieving her humiliation and pain was the right thing to do. If a person is hungry, you feed them, whatever day it is. If a person is hurting, you help them. If a person is handicapped, you heal them; never mind you are breaking the rules.

In this story, Jesus tells us to break the rules. Don't wait when there is a need. Don't wait for the "right time" to get help for others, to get involved, to right a wrong.

It is against the rules to leave water in the desert for migrants coming across the border.

Break the rules.

It is illegal to speed to the hospital with your child who can't breathe.

Break the rules.

It is illegal to hide a person from authorities, even in a church, even if they are fleeing from an abusive partner or a gang that wants to initiate their children.

Break the rules.

In Nazi, Germany it was illegal to hide Jews.

People broke the rules.

We know that there are rules that are created to divide people, to alienate people, and to keep people silent.

Break the rules.

Is it "lawful" to keep families in jail.

It is "lawful" to keep detainees without allowing them access to attorneys.

It is "lawful" to take an immigrant child from their biological family and put them in foster care.

Break. The. Rules.

Jesus did.