

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – August 31, 2025

¹⁴ One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ⁶ And they could not reply to these things.

- Luke 14:1-6 -

Have you ever met people whose hearts are hardened against you? It does not matter what you do or say, they will not see your point of view. And if you present conclusive evidence for your claim, this will only make them angry, rather than convincing them. Because the problem is their heart, and not their head, they cannot agree with your point of view, no matter how well-reasoned. They cannot because they will not, and they will not because their will is hardened, bound, and set against you. Accordingly, they resist you with all the power of their bound will.

In our gospel reading, Jesus encounters people like this. One Sabbath he dines at a Pharisee's house while the Pharisee's suspicious colleagues scrutinize Jesus intensely. They are already set against Jesus, even before he speaks or acts. They suspect that he is up to no good.

Someone needs healing. So Jesus asks the lawyers and Pharisees if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. However, they do not answer. They know they can't say "no", but if they say "yes", they will have nothing to hold against Jesus, and this won't work because their hearts are already set against him. They are looking for an excuse to get him, so they must keep their powder dry.

Finally, after healing the man, Jesus asks them if they would pull their son or their ox out of a pit on the Sabbath, but they could not answer. Of course, there was no intellectual difficulty that prevented them from answering. This wasn't rocket science. They knew what the correct answer was, but they could not answer because they would not, and they would not because their hearts were hardened, bound, and set against Jesus.

We are like this. Because our hearts are bound in sin, we resist God in the face of known truth. As Paul says, we suppress God's truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). In fact, we are so blind that, like the lawyers and the Pharisees, we would prevent Jesus from healing others and even ourselves. However, God heals us anyway, beginning with our hardened hearts. Through the Holy Spirit, God opens our eyes to see Jesus and opens our hearts to receive him. And this is why we in the Lutheran tradition view faith as God's gift. By God's grace, we believe, despite our best efforts not to.