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The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 21<sup>st</sup> 2016  
Luke 13: 10-17

*Christians as Authors of Fan Fiction*

“And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.” (Genesis 2:2) This account of creation sets the example for how we order our lives, or at least the Judeo-Christian roots for how lives might be ordered. God rested on the seventh day and so we rest from our work. Sabbath theology affects all kinds of ethical concerns in the Bible. In Leviticus, for example, there is a Sabbath year in which the fields get a year of rest. The sense is that all of creation needs rest from work.

And yet working on the Sabbath gets Jesus in trouble on more than one occasion. Luke, in particular, emphasizes working on the Sabbath. This story, that we hear today, is the fifth and final story. This time Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath, a woman who has been bent over for eighteen years.

The leaders of the synagogue are upset, though, that Jesus did some kind of work on the Sabbath. Jesus then calls them hypocrites. Loopholes have been found for doing the work of untying animals or other tasks that need to be done in order to move through the day, why not make an exception for a human being, a woman who has needed healing touch for so many years?

Note that to a first century audience, disfigurement meant disfavor from God. This woman, in other words, didn't get bent over by accident. God made her this way, probably for God's own good purposes which are not ours to question or interfere with.

And for a 21<sup>st</sup> audience, even we might sympathize with an overworked synagogue employee who just wants this woman, who after all has waited 18 years already, to show up during office hours. Boundaries need to be set and observed and there is far more healing that needs to be done than we can ever do in a lifetime. I mean really.

Sabbath theology has been on the rise in recent years. Theology that speaks to the modern condition of workaholicism that feeds a need to consume more and then produce more to consume. This is good stuff. How to rest and how to rest well should be on our minds and I hope the rhythms of worship and prayer help us rest.

But I wonder if Luke's point is not really that the Sabbath is time for work or, in other words, that the issue is rest versus work, but instead questioning what kind of work, or maybe asking the question what's our work up to.

The account in Genesis of the creation of the world, God's great work, can be interpreted in a couple of ways, even if one is reading it as mythology or lore and not as concrete fact. Either God created the world and rested on the seventh day because God was done and creation was completed or the Sabbath day was merely a pause in ongoing creation activities.

An intriguing image of creation comes not from Genesis, but from the book of Proverbs where the narrator, a feminine figure called Wisdom or Sophia in the Greek, dances before God at creation<sup>1</sup>. This feminine wisdom figure is associated with Jesus, especially in the gospel of John, as the Logos, the Word who was with God during creation, was with us again in the life of Jesus, and might be up to something now, through us, his people.

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<sup>1</sup> See Proverbs 8:30; compare with John 1:1-20

These ideas converge in the hippie hymn that I grew up with and that I hope you know too, *The Lord of the Dance*, in which Jesus is the dancer in a dance that happened at the beginning of time and goes on today as well.

This idea of creation as not just work, but a work of art got me thinking about fan fiction. Fan fiction is the genre that takes a beloved story and continues it into desired avenues unexplored by the original author. The Star Wars universe created by George Lucas has been taken up by an army of fans who have created their own canon of further adventures. And of course, E.L. James made a fortune creating fan fiction of Stephanie Myers' Twilight series for her own Fifty Shades of Grey series. Fan Fiction has a kind of pathetic quality to it: it is unoriginal, it depends on a, usually, superior work. And since it is located often in nerd culture, it has the nerd's embarrassing trait of loving fictional characters unabashedly and un-ironically.

But fanfiction does see works of art, creations, as unfinished works and as belonging to all of us. I thought about this recently when I read a series of takes, not exactly fanfiction, but thought studies in the inner lives of beloved characters who were mistreated by their original author: There was first a lovely take on Susan Pevensie, from the Narnia books, who after becoming a queen of Narnia, a master archer, is dismissed entirely from that world, perhaps even damned, when her older brother, Peter, explains that she is no longer a friend of Narnia because she has discovered nylons and lipstick<sup>2</sup>. Yikes! C.S. Lewis and women – not a good combination! But this essay takes Susan seriously. The author imagines the devastating pain she experiences when she loses her entire family. This essay imagines Susan, robbed of one

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ink-splotch.tumblr.com/post/69470941562/there-comes-a-point-where-susan-who-was-the>

kingdom, robbed of her family, moving through this world like a queen she is – recognizing the power of nylons and lipstick and also of bravery and wisdom.

The second was an essay on Meg March from *Little Women*, nobodies' favorite sister, considered lovable only because universally loved sister Jo says she loves Meg, so it must be so<sup>3</sup>. Meg's only story of note is when her friend shames her for wearing borrowed fancy clothes to a posh party. Oh, and she also marries the world's most boring man, John Brooke. This essay champions Meg as a kind of patron saint of the slog of adulthood that we all go through. The compromises we all must make with the status quo. If she annoys you as a teenager, you realize with recognition that she IS you at age 40. How sympathetic she becomes and she finally becomes a beloved sister to us all.

The third essay is actually a summary of new and upcoming fanfiction efforts centered around the character of Mary Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice*, as if there were some kind of collective consciousness that this is what we need right now – a redeemed Mary<sup>4</sup>. Jane Austen dismisses the third sister who wants to say something sensible but doesn't know how. She is plain; she is pathetic. What happens to this plain, dismissible young woman, asks fanfiction? Again, like Meg, she is a kind of champion to those of us who feel plain next to more witty and lovely companions, those of us who would like to say something sensible, but do not know what to say. Surely she deserves more of an inner life. Jane Austen takes no pity on her, but might not we?

These three examples of fan fiction seemed to me to be examples of a new author rescuing a character, seeing in her hidden depths and possibilities.

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<sup>3</sup><http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/07/18/no-one-likes-meg/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/08/theres-something-about-mary-bennet/496322/>

Creation as an art work means that it might not belong to the author alone, for art belongs to us all. Understanding the world as artwork means not just that we might be called on to do works of fanfiction and finish parts of the story, but that our work is creative labor. We are master craftsmen – adding more color here, fleshing out a story there.

Jesus shows us the pattern of creative artistry in the world. The woman who has been bent over for 18 years has a story. Perhaps not telling her story has made her shrink, has hobbled her so much that she doubles over onto herself. But creation is not done with her yet and whatever weight upon her back she has been carrying is lifted. Jesus' artistic work is liberating.

Christians are called to be fanfiction writers to God's original creation. And like good fanfiction writers we should love unabashedly and un-ironically. Christians as artists are unleashing new ideas and new perspectives and welcoming casts of characters not previously welcomed on this stage. This framing of our work as artwork may not change the work so much, but how we think about work. It redeems our work. We do not just toil in a world of somebody else's making; we play in it, delight in it, and create it anew.