



Lectionary 21, Year C

Bishop Don Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod

11th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 13;10-17

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰ Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day." ¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? ¹⁶ And 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?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

SERMON TEXT:

Dear Ones, dear friends,
Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ,
who used the Sabbath to heal and to set free.

St. Luke is the only evangelist who tells this particular story of Jesus healing the woman who was bent over.
And that's worth noticing, I think.

The story takes place on the Sabbath and Jesus is in the synagogue, which is where we expect to find him.
And Jesus is teaching, which is what we expect him to be doing, on a Sabbath in the Synagogue.
So far, so good.

And "just then," Luke says, in the middle of everything unfolding exactly as we thought it would, there appeared a woman afflicted with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years.

Now, 18 years of suffering is certainly a bad thing, and certainly worth noticing.
The woman's sudden appearance is also worth noticing because in Luke's gospel we need to pay attention to those folks who appear "just then."

The paralyzed man, for instance, whose friends lower him through a hole in the roof, appears "just then."

Jairus, a leader of the Synagogue, appears "just then," seeking healing for his daughter.

Likewise, a father whose son is possessed by a demon appears "just then," to seek Jesus' help.

The disciples had been unable to cast it out, but Jesus does, and gives the child back to his father.

The lawyer who "just then," stood up to test Jesus. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

So when this woman appears "just then," we get a sense that something big is going on here, something important that we need to pay attention to.

But what Luke goes on to say in the gospel for this morning is very specific:

the woman is crippled by being bent over, she is quite unable to stand up straight and has been that way for 18 years.

And what are we to do with that, dear Ones? "Bent over."

Because really, that doesn't seem that awful at first.

Inconvenient, certainly. Awkward? Most definitely.

But life threatening? Not so much.

But before we get too far away from that I want you to remember how your back felt at the end of your first day back in the garden this spring,

when you spent all those hours pulling weeds and spreading mulch and separating the hostas,

and when you were done you thought you'd never be able to stand up again.

Do you remember?

Or maybe it was just the last time you took a long drive in the car –five or six hours–and you were making good time and didn't want to stop except that when you did you realized you could hardly get out of the car

and that it felt like your whole body had seized up.

Anybody?

And for this woman in Luke's gospel that feeling, that pain, was an everyday experience without hope that things were going to finally loosen up.

18 years she had been bent over, unable to stand, unable to stretch, unable to look anyone older than six or seven in the eye, always having to turn her head in order to see where she was going, always looking down or across at the world, and never able to look up to see the sky or the stars or a rainbow. For 18 years.

And there she was in the synagogue that morning. Think about it!

Every day for her was a test, every day was more awkwardness, more pain.

Still she carried on as best she could,
and as we read, was still willing,
still able, and still determined to come to the synagogue
to be a part of the community at worship,
and to sing psalms, and to hear prayers spoken and scripture
read.

And Jesus saw her.

Luke doesn't tell us what about her caught his eye
—whether she came in late that morning and had to sit up front,
whether her usual seat had been taken by a visitor,
or if Jesus was simply looking for her from the moment he came
in.

What he does tell us, however, is that Jesus called her to him, and
she came.

Without asking her name
(or because that was how he addressed all women his mother's
age,)
Jesus spoke to her:

Woman, you are set free from your ailment.

And he laid his hands on her.
Immediately she stood up straight and walked over and joined
the Praise Band, glorifying God and picking up a tambourine.

(I made that part up, but it could have happened.)

And the leader of the synagogue:
you'd have thought he'd been delighted.
You'd have thought he would have joined the woman in praising
God

for the grace and healing shown to her.
You'd have thought he might have used the occasion
to speak about the wideness of God's mercy,
and to sing of how God's eyes are on the sparrow and I know he
watches me.

But if you thought any of those things you'd be wrong.

There are six other days to be cured, is what he tells the
congregation,
this Sabbath day should be about what we have planned,
not about what God is up to!

You see, as Luke tells the story, it seems all the leader cared
about
was that the order of service had been interrupted,
the liturgy had been disrespected,
and the carefully scripted and controlled service
in which there was no room for surprise, or mercy, or joy
was thrown into utter chaos
by God's unexpected presence revealed
in Jesus' abundant and healing love.

Because the leader of the synagogue is so anxious to be in
charge,
he cannot acknowledge the miracle in front of him;

he cannot even bring himself to be the littlest bit happy for the woman
who had been bent over but was now standing tall and proud.

And Jesus is outraged.

He calls him "hypocrite!" which is the worst word Jesus ever uses in scripture,
and asks the question that I want to leave with all of you today,
because I've been wrestling with it for a while now.

***"And ought not this woman,
a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for 18 long years,
be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"***

And I think that's where Jesus is asking them, and asking us:

Well, what do you think church is for?

What do you think worship does?

*And if a day when God's people are gathered is not a day for God to act,
then when is that day?*

Those are the questions that come to me,
that come to us from this story this morning,
and I am really asking you to think about them, dear Ones.

Because here you are—here we are—
on this Sunday morning in August
and we have named and called God--God revealed as Father,
Son and Holy Spirit
to be among us.

And that should do something!
And that should mean something!

And because we have been named and called
by the one who died on the cross for us,
we need to understand—we need to expect—that every time we
gather we put ourselves at risk of being touched,
or nudged or even filled with the Holy Spirit of God
who empowers us to go out and make a difference in the world.

So what are we waiting for? Who are we waiting for?

All the congregations of this Church have an enormous capacity
to make a change in our communities –to speak a word of peace,
to offer a show of support, to make a real contribution to real
needs that you know about far better than I do.

So go! Do!

Bring the good news of Jesus with you when you go out of here!

What else should God's children be doing on the Sabbath day?

Amen

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