Year C, Proper 16, Luke 13:10-17; August 25, 2019

It is so good to be back with you in this pulpit this Sunday. We have so much to celebrate in our family as our son Preston has improved. And in my head, as I had prepared for a long absence, working my way out of meetings and so forth, and especially since it all went so well in Texas, it has nearly felt like a mini-Sabbatical. Even though I was only gone a week and a half, it feels like I’ve been gone a lot longer. And that theme of Sabbath is particularly timely since today’s passage is all about what Sabbath time is for. And it’s about healing. Praise the Lord! Listen now for the Word of the Lord from Luke 13:10-17:

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 away to give it 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 that he was doing.

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord; **Thanks be to God.**

We had a passage very similar to this last week in Sunday school—Jesus getting fussed at for healing on the Sabbath. And Jesus kind of does the same thing here and says, “What a dumb thing to fuss at somebody for. What do you think the Sabbath is for?” And then the leaders of the synagogue are put to shame and the people are happy with Jesus and happy for the woman. It’s just the kind of thing that seems right—to everybody except the muckity-mucks who hold the rulebook.

So I love Jesus’s kind of clarifying that he does about Sabbath.nly lives and we need to share it with those around us. gh us. the garden that God might cause the increase.. But the Sabbath is important. But what does “Keeping the Sabbath” mean? And we can ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do on the Sabbath?” Clearly, Jesus would not be using his Sabbath time to Lord it over others who are bent down with struggles. Jesus calls those muckity-muck leaders, “You hypocrites!”

Jesus comes to the synagogue to share his reading of the texts, to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath, which Luke shows him doing as his custom throughout the gospel. So here he is—Jesus on the Sabbath, teaching in the synagogue. It’s a Sabbath activity. And it’s Sabbath time. And this woman, unnamed, but a daughter of Abraham, a woman bent down with struggles, comes to worship and pray. How many of us come to the church house bent down with struggles? On any given Sunday, many of us are. Every Sunday. This is the place to turn to when life’s struggles have you bent low.

But see this woman here in the text. Is she seeking healing? Look at the text. The text says, “Just then there appeared a woman.” The text doesn’t say she anticipated healing. It doesn’t say she sought healing. The text just says, “there appeared a woman.” It’s even written in the passive voice; she’s not “walking” or “talking” or “doing” anything but just appearing here in the synagogue.

“There appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Now this is curious to me. In 1st century Palestine, how many crippled men, women, and children do you think the average Joe saw in a day? I’ve never read a single biblical text about back surgeries, bone density scans or calcium supplements, no Lions club glasses, no hearing aids, no mention of setting a broken leg so it can heal properly. We do, however, hear about cots, and litters, about folks who can do nothing but sit in one spot all day every day with their hands held out in supplication.

And if the average Joe daily saw all these afflicted, how many do you think Jesus saw? They were coming out of the woodwork to find him. I imagine for Jesus it would have been almost refreshing to see a crippled person who wasn’t begging for healing or whose friends weren’t begging on his or her behalf. But none of that was going on. She just appeared.

How easy would it have been for Christ to say, “Oh, good, I can finish my lesson here—this is important work, too, studying in the Synagogue.” He was certainly due for his own Sabbath time. Surely for Christ this was renewing time, sitting in the synagogue, a platform for teaching, folks gathered around to listen.

But Jesus reveals what Sabbath is for, the purpose of Sabbath, on his very first visit to the synagogue as Luke tells the story. Luke chapter 4 says, “He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Sabbath is about that. Bringing in the kingdom. In Sabbath time and Sabbath spaces we are freed to follow where God would lead us by his Spirit—not where the religious muckity-mucks would lead us. We’re freed to follow Christ.

We are freed, and that freedom is a real thing. But we are not just freed. We are freed for. We are freed for service. Just as the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, not just for freedom’s sake, but that they might now serve God, that God would be their Master.

We receive the Good News so that we can pass it on. We have our sight restored so that we can show others the way. We have the Good News proclaimed to us so that we can share it abroad. We have our health restored so we can help others who need it. We have our hands healed so they can fix meals on Tuesdays. We have our shoulders repaired so we can load food boxes on Wednesdays. We have our voices restored so we can praise God on Sundays. We have our depression attended to by Christ so we can reach out to others. And maybe in so doing we find our depression is lessened by being obedient to Christ.

We have our fears released to God so that we can find joy and strength in God to help a neighbor who’s at the end of her rope. We suffer through thin times financially so we can understand and empathize with the young mother of three who can’t pay her rent.

We have a season on crutches or with a walking stick so we remember to hold the door for someone in a wheelchair. We are freed in Christ. Not just so we can enjoy it. Sit by the pool and bask in it. No, Church. We are freed in Christ for. Freed in Christ for the Other. Freed in Christ for Service. Freed in Christ for sharing empathy and love and mercy and for sometimes, for throwing out the rule book of the religious muckity mucks.

But sometimes it feels like we’re all still like this woman, bent down with a spirit of affliction that keeps us from raising our heads to see what kind of time it is, we’re looking at the ground instead of looking ahead and looking up to see the sky. We hear voices of good news, but instead of lifting our eyes to see ahead of us, we turn our heads a little to this side, and a little to that. But sometimes even we can’t see it.

Sometimes we don’t even know we need it still. Good News! Oh, Yes, we all need the Good News, too. In our own lives we need it, and we need to share it with those around us. Release and recovery. Freedom from the evil in this world and the evil and the worry that sometimes takes root in our own hearts and lives. We need to hear that this is the year of the Lord’s favor—the fullness of time, the coming of Christ here. And here. And out there too.

But how do we even do that? How do we release the anxiety, the worry, the feelings of shame or unworthiness, the selfishness that keep us focused on the things of earth—staring at the ground instead of the wide vistas of grace and love, of the possibility of what Christ can do in us and for us and for others through us.

But that’s just it. It isn’t even right to ask that question, “How do we even do that?” It’s not something we do. It’s what Christ does in us. It’s what Christ does for us. And even though this woman had no visible sign of seeking healing, **Christ** called her over. **Christ** declared, “You are set free from your ailment.” **Christ** laid his hands upon her. And she stretched out that long twisted posture, and praised God. And so did all who saw her.

O Lord God, stretch out our long twisted posture. Lift our heads that we might see more than just the limited view a few feet in front of us. Show us how to accept your ministry to us, and then give us the courage and joy to pass it on that we might all praise you together. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Luke 13:11, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 4:16-19, NRSV. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)