

Eleventh Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "Jesus Healed Then; Jesus Heals Now"  
Luke 13:10-17  
August 24-25, 2019  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Greeting people at the door after worship I often hear, "I'm sorry we were running late!" If folks didn't tattle on themselves, I wouldn't know most of the time. And when I do notice a late arrival, I'm just glad you're here! I'm certainly not going to call out from pulpit or altar, "Glad you could make it!"

Jesus did a kind of call-out in today's Gospel, as He's teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Here's the description from *The Message* of what happened:

*There was a woman present, so twisted and bent over with arthritis that she couldn't even look up. She had been afflicted with this for eighteen years. When Jesus saw her, he called her over. "Woman, you're free!" He laid hands on her and suddenly she was standing straight and tall, giving glory to God.*  
(Luke 13:10-13)

If rules were crystal glasses, Jesus had just swept a dozen off the table and sent them shattering on the floor. How did the Lord break the rules? Let us count the ways.

- He **probably** wasn't supposed to break the flow of worship.
- He **certainly** wasn't supposed to be talking to a woman in public.
- He **definitely** wasn't supposed to invite a woman into the men's section of the synagogue, where seating was segregated by gender.
- He **absolutely** wasn't supposed to be touching a woman.

Our Lord didn't violate all these boundaries because the woman soulfully begged Him to. She was silent, hadn't said a word. We don't have to wave our arms around either, or set off fireworks to get our Savior's attention. He sees. He cares. He saves.

This little lady whose spine had morphed into a question mark, who'd been staring at her sandals for years as she painfully shuffled along, who had to turn her head to the side to look anyone sort-of-in-the-eye, simply showed up in worship. It was enough.

*[Jesus] laid his hands on her and suddenly she was standing straight and tall, giving glory to God. (Luke 13:13, The Message)*

She was a woman of faith. Despite her handicap and her difficulty getting around, she remained faithful in worship. Her very presence broadcast her faith. And when she was made whole she recognized the gift, knew Whom to thank and did so immediately.

I accompanied a church friend recently to a medical appointment. A staffperson was obviously delighted to see the patient's progress toward healing and openly, gladly, energetically commented, "The Lord's hand is on you! He is doing marvelous things in you! God be praised!" The staffperson was bold to say this in her work environment. She was giving glory to God. She was reminding the patient that God is present in love and power. She was naming God's desire and ability to heal. Her faith built me up.

One person reflecting on this story of the bent-over woman whom Jesus straightened up, asks us, "**Do we wish to be made whole to glorify God, or to be cured just enough to rid us of discomfort?**"<sup>1</sup> There aren't a lot of people who come to our healing service. I always wonder why. I think many people who truly believe that Jesus healed **then** don't expect Him to heal **now**. Unless someone has a doctor phobia, I'm guessing most of us seek medical care for a sickness or injury. Most of us are probably pretty compliant taking prescribed medication, going for tests that have been ordered, making and showing up for follow-up appointments. The older we get the more time we invest in staying healthy or regaining health. That's good stewardship of our bodies, taking good care of them, allowing God's healing grace to flow through people with the spiritual gift of healing: physicians, nurses, physical therapists, counselors, etc. I'm just saying that as people of faith, as a community of faith, we never want to leave God out of the equation. You're here in worship, so you certainly ask the Lord's healing grace for yourself and loved

ones. Don't discount the possibility of healing that comes directly from on high. Don't despair of miracles. Consider the possibility that in addition to medical or psychological care, the laying on of hands and anointing with holy oil can strengthen, mend, heal that which is broken or ailing in body, mind or spirit.

In His inaugural address in another synagogue, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and announced that He had come to proclaim liberty to captives (Luke 4:18). He did that: freed captives of Satan through exorcism, captives of sickness through healing, captives of sin through forgiveness. By His death and resurrection our Lord opened the gates of the spiritual Bastille and, to quote Luther, set us free from sin, death and the devil. On the Sabbath mentioned in today's Gospel, though, the leader of the synagogue is so focused on the rulebook that he misses the miracle. He browbeats the now erect woman and all the other worshipers when he spits out this response:

*"Six days have been defined as work days. Come on one of the six if you want to be healed, but not on the seventh, the Sabbath."*

*But Jesus shot back, "You frauds! Each Sabbath every one of you unties your cow or donkey from its stall, leads it out for water, and thinks nothing of it. So why isn't it all right for me to untie this daughter of Abraham and lead her from the stall where Satan has had her tied these eighteen years?"*

Luke 13:14-16 (*The Message*)

Jesus longs to untie each of us, longs to unburden us of the unholy weight that is breaking our back or breaking our spirit, longs for us to walk upright again, with the dignity of the children of God. God wants us to live the resurrected life now and not just later. In holy Baptism we were freed from the need to serve only ourselves; the Holy Spirit lifted the oppression of human self-absorption. We were set apart for Christ. As Paul wrote, *"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live... I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20) As we live

in and for Christ, we live for each other. We are called to lift burdens off each other's back, as God's grace empowers us. We are called to be agents of liberation for those who stumble under heavy loads that God wants lifted. "*The Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah, bright wings!*"<sup>2</sup> Sometimes that Holy Spirit uses us to allow "the bent world" to stand up straight again!

There's the tie-in with our first lesson from Isaiah (58:9b-10):

*If you **remove the yoke** from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

Removing the yoke from the afflicted includes feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the stranger, advocating for the poor, using our strong, God-given voice for the voiceless in the halls of power. It means fighting every form of discrimination that shackles God's children to a future of despair, liberating each child of God from the prison of hunger, poverty, lack of health care, lack of clean water, lack of hope that incarcerates the spirit.

Our faith is very **personal** but is never intended to be **private**. We are the Church for the sake of the world. The world's suffering is our deep concern and the world's healing is our divine vocation. As one wise person has written, "[N]o one stands upright as long as others are bent over."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 8 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur."

<sup>3</sup>Helen Bruch Pearson, *Do What You Have the Power to Do* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1992), p. 55.

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