

Pentecost 11C 21 August 2022  
Luke 13:10-17  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace, peace, and healing to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 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. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. Let's pray: ....*

A word of encouragement before diving into today's lesson.

In the synagogue on the Sabbath this poor woman is almost invisible. She's doubled over to almost half her original height, crippled in body and soul; no-one sees her. Yet, Jesus is always vigilant, looking out for those who are bowed down. This poor soul is the least noticed of all the people in the gathering, yet she's the most considered by Jesus' gracious countenance. His tender look remains with her until his deed of love is done. Likewise, some among you this morning, feel the least observed of anybody, those who bear burdens that are either too personal or too painful to share. You feel quite alone and you're in that solitude now. Do not be afraid. My heart is gunning for you, but there is far greater joy in the fact that Jesus has his eye on you right now. He won't ignore you; rather, he will comfort your distress with a special Sabbath blessing. Though you feel among the last, you will be invited to the head of the table where Jesus will work a miracle of love in you.

Let's dig for the gems embedded in today's gospel.

### **1. BOWING DOWN OF THE AFFLICTED.**

This poor woman has been crippled for eighteen years. She' lost all her brightness and vitality. I can imagine that as a girl she was fleet-footed, wide-eyed and bushy-tailed, walking with her head held high, face to the sun by day and the moon by night. Her life was care free, full of joy and childish glee. But there gradually crept over her an infirmity which dragged her down and drew her more and more towards herself and towards the earth.

For eighteen years she hasn't lifted her head to gaze at the sun, moon, and stars; her face is drawn downward towards the dust, the light of her life is dim, and she walks around as if searching for a grave. She's restricted as if handcuffed, and as much imprisoned as if surrounded by stone walls. We too have known or are currently suffering conditions like this. Some brief, some much longer. Bowed down, with memories of happier days that only deepen the affliction.

The first thing to note is that, as bowed down as she is in both mind and body, the woman attends synagogue. She doesn't excuse herself because of her infirmity. She's there and Jesus is there. The devil constantly suggests that we've heard enough of God's Word; that we don't need to be here. Come anyway. If the devil can keep you away, he will. But observe; it's while in God's house and Jesus' presence, that this woman gains her freedom.

The devil binds this woman like an animal, but he can't take away her identity as a daughter of Abraham. Despite her condition, she's still a believing soul trusting in God by humble faith. Her heart is right with God, because the moment she's healed she begins glorifying God. Praise is stored up in her spirit just waiting for this joyful opportunity. Even though bowed down for eighteen years, going up to the house of God gives her a measure of consolation. Where else would she go? What good is there in staying at home? A sick child is best in its father's house, and what better place to be than where hurting souls are met by a gracious, loving, healing Father.

## **2. SATAN'S HAND IN THIS BONDAGE.**

This poor woman is restrained from what her soul needs. She's like a beast fenced off from a waterhole. She hears the promises read every Sabbath day; she goes to synagogue and hears of he who sets captives free; but she can't rejoice in the promise or feel free. There're times when God's dear people become inward looking, bound, fastened, and can't drink from the river of life nor find consolation in the Scriptures. They know how precious the gospel is and how comforting the blessings are, but they can't enjoy them.

Satan has this woman bound, but can't kill her. He bends her towards the grave, but can't push her into it. With all his craftiness and cunning, he can't make her die before her time or give up her faith. Neither can the devil destroy you, children of God. He can harass you, but he knows he can't destroy you. Satan can't touch this poor woman because of her true standing as a daughter of Abraham.

Likewise, Saints, even if you don't have a comfortable sense of the Lord's love, you're still his beloved. Though you may continue to struggle, know that your name is written on Christ's hand, where nothing can erase it. You belong to Jesus, and nothing can snatch you out of his hand (John 10:28). The devil may bind you fast with lies and infirmity, but Christ has bound you more powerfully with cords of everlasting love.

Without knowing it, the devil prepared this poor woman to glorify God. Nobody in the synagogue could glorify God as she did when she was at last set free. Every year out of the eighteen added power and intensity to her thanksgiving. The deeper her sorrow the sweeter her song. In the end, the devil had only been preparing the woman to tell more sweetly the story of Jesus' wonderful love.

### **3. JESUS AT WORK.**

Jesus sees this woman. He scans the gathering, reading every heart as he glances from person to person. He sees this woman, the very one he's seeking. He doesn't see her in the same way as I see you, but he reads every line of her character and history, every thought of her heart, every desire of her soul. Jesus knows all about her; how she came to be bound, what she's suffered for so long, how she prays for healing, and how the infirmity still troubles her. In a moment, Jesus reads her history and understands her case. Jesus really sees her.

Jesus has wonderful eyes. All the painters in the world will never be able to produce a satisfactory picture of Christ, because there's no way to adequately express the enigma of his loving gaze. Heaven rests in calm repose in his eyes; they're bright and penetrating, full of irresistible tenderness, and a strength which secures confidence. I imagine that tears rolled from Jesus' eyes as he anticipated the joy of healing this faithful woman.

When he gazed upon the woman, he called her to him. Does he know her name? Yes, he knows all our names and his call is personal and unmistakable, 'I have called you by name, you are mine .... and I love you' (Isaiah 43:1 .... 4).

The woman can't stand to meet Jesus' gaze, but she need only come as she is — bent and broken. That's how Jesus is. He meets us just as we are. He doesn't demand that we do something first, then he'll do the rest. Rather, Jesus begins and ends. He bids us to approach him just as we are. All he asks is that we come to him humbly acknowledging:

“Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come.” (LHS 335 v4)

Jesus lays his hands on the poor woman and pours his life into her. The warm stream of heaven’s infinite power and vitality overcomes the toxic stream of her painful existence, freeing her to stand up straight. These are the same blessed, pierced hands that bought you, the same mighty hands that rule heaven and earth, the same blessed, outstretched hands that plead for sinners, the same dear hands which hold you close to his heart and lift up your soul when it’s bowed down.

#### **4. JESUS DOES THE SAME THING TODAY.**

For eighteen years this woman has been crippled and it moves Jesus to set her free. He won’t wait another minute. “No,” says Christ, “if she’s been bound eighteen years, she’ll not wait another minute; she’ll be set free at once.”

I know it all sounds idyllic in Scripture and that such things don’t ever seem to happen this way for us, but there’s a truth that’s worth holding fast to when our dark nights seem never-ending. Rather than focusing on the length of your misery; train yourself to think that release is near. The night has been so long, it must be so much nearer the dawn. You’ve been suffering for so long that it must be so much nearer the last stroke, for God doesn’t will affliction nor grieve his children. This is the kind of thinking and hope that keeps people like Kingsley Hage and my father, John, going. So, take heart and be of good courage, beloved of Jesus. Our good Lord will come and set you free.

I know what being bound by Satan is like. The devil hasn’t bound me for eighteen years at a stretch, but he has brought me into sad bondage. Still, Jesus comes and sets me free, and leads me to his replenishing waters. And how I drink. I feel I could drain the Jordan when I’m reminded of his promises and I draw my fill of his sweet love. I know he leads many poor souls to waters of life, and when he does so for you, I hope you drink like an ox. Drink in his grace and rejoice while you’re able. Let your soul delight in his bounty and shout for joy, for Jesus looses prisoners and sets them free. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.