

## **Luke 13:10-17; Pentecost 11C; 8/21/22 Pastor Ellen Schoepf**

This morning I share with you the story of a woman who had a life-changing, transformational experience. One morning, this woman decided she would attempt to get up, get ready, and go to morning worship. As she did this, she was again reminded of how twisted and broken her body had become. The pain in her back was at times excruciating and, when she moved to get ready, she knew the pain she was feeling meant she would be moving quite slowly. Her back always seemed to hurt, and she was so bent over that when she looked at other people she had to look out of the corner of her eye. She could only see others by looking sideways because she could not lift her head to look up. The truth of the matter was that she spent most of her time looking at the ground. And, if she was finally able to actually see someone face to face, other people's eyes quickly turned away as though they did not want to acknowledge the fact that they had been watching her.

She had lived like this for eighteen long years, and after all this time, she could hardly remember any other way of seeing the world. Her body was so stooped and twisted she often felt ashamed of the way she looked and frequently she just did not want to go out in public. Truth be told,

sometimes she just wanted to disappear. She felt nameless, a person living lost amidst the crowd.

However, on this particular Sabbath, there was a special excitement at the synagogue, so she decided she would attempt to go to worship. On this particular day, a preacher from Galilee, a prophet called Jesus of Nazareth, had arrived in town and he would be doing the teaching. She, along with many others, had heard reports about this man called Jesus – how he talked about God's reign arriving soon and how he healed sick people. Truthfully, she was rather skeptical and not sure how many of the rumors could be believed. However, she decided to go and was trying not to get her hopes up. Her life already had too many disappointments to count.

When she entered the synagogue, the place was abuzz. She stood in the back of the room. She really did not want to be noticed. As Jesus began to teach, however, the room was hushed. After a few moments, his words turned from teaching to invitation. He had somehow caught her eye, and this was no mean feat, given that **he** had to lean over and incline **his** head to do so. Jesus saw her! And, he did not look away, he stayed looking into her eyes. He seemed to be looking deep into her being with such compassion. In fact, he had **stopped** teaching and he was talking to

her! "Come here," he said to her. He really wanted **her** to come over to where he was in front of all the people. She could not believe what she was hearing – he wanted **her** to come forward. She slowly made her way to the front of the assembly, wondering what he was going to say.

What happened next amazed the whole congregation. "Woman, you are **set free** from your ailment." When this man, Jesus, spoke those words with such compassion and put his hands on her broken, bent body, she felt power surge through her. It was a power that seemed to bathe her inside and out, a power that embraced her, engulfed her in a healing balm. And then the most amazing thing happened, that power transformed her entire body, and the pain was washed away, it just disappeared. Without hesitation, she straightened her once crooked back. She stood tall and praised her God . . . She had not asked for healing; she really could not even have dreamed this would happen to her. She had lived in bondage to a broken body for so many years, and this prophet, this Jesus, called her forth, and set her free.

Well, the leader in the synagogue was not impressed with Jesus' actions. He reprimanded Jesus for doing such healing work on the Sabbath. But Jesus responded saying, "You show compassion to your bound and tethered animals on the Sabbath by untying them and leading

them to water and you think nothing of it. So why is it not all right for me to untie this daughter of Abraham, a person and not an animal, and set her free from the stall where Satan has had her tied for these eighteen years?”

Wow! Jesus not only had set her free, but he also gave her a name and status, calling her a daughter of Abraham, making her truly feel like a **member** of the community. Well, after Jesus said these things, his critics were left looking quite silly. But the congregation was delighted, and the people rejoiced.

People, this story is not just another story about a woman in the Bible being healed and transformed. This story is **our** story. This is the story of you, and the story of me. Jesus looked at this woman in such a way as to embrace her whole life and being. He looked at her, put his hand on her and communicated the message of his entire ministry – the message that the reign of God is at hand, and He is the one who is ushering in the reign of God in healing power to those who need it most. He communicated the message that God loves us and names us as God’s own. He communicated the message that we have value and infinite worth, and in Christ, God sets us free, free to be who we are called to be.

Most of us, if not all of us, have heard messages about ourselves. We have endured actions and attitudes toward ourselves that hurt us badly.

And some of these messages and attitudes have often caused us physically and mentally to stoop our shoulders, to be bent over, and to be held in bondage. Some of these messages and attitudes prevent us from living fully into relationship – relationship with God, with others around us and with our very selves. Some of these messages have at times caused us to be disappointed in ourselves, perhaps even lose hope in our possibilities and hope for the future. **We** are the ones who are in need of that same healing power, and it is as available to us as it was to her.

I stand here and bear witness on this very morning as I tell you these words: it is because of Jesus that I know God to be a God who not only loves me beyond measure, but loves me enough to grasp me, to hold me and not let me go, to heal me, and to change me into the person God created me to be. And that is true of you as well. Opening ourselves to the loving gaze and healing touch of Jesus changes us and transforms us. No matter who we are or where we are in our lives, we need not just **some** changes – we need **transformation**, and we need to be **made new**.

And so, I ask you, what has you bound or keeps your life in bondage? What keeps you from fully living into eternal life – life that truly matters – in this present moment, in this present time? Is it mistakes of the past? Is it anger or hatred? Is it fear? Is it anxiety? Is it an ideology? Is it cultic

ideology that has a grip on you? Is it conspiracy theories? Is it a failed relationship? Is it memories – do you live in your world of memories and a past that no longer exists? Is it an addiction? Or is it grief and suppressed anger that keeps you living in the tombs of loved ones who are no longer alive? What is it that is keeping you from fully living into relationship with God, with others, and with your very self?

Jesus is always calling and inviting each one of us saying, “Come forth, come and enter into life in all its fullness.” Jesus is calling each one of us to a new vision of the way things **ought** to be with ourselves and with the world. Jesus wants to set you free! In the person of Jesus, God says to you, to me, to each one of us, “The Kingdom of God is at hand, it is within you, it is in your midst.”

Jesus came preaching the kingdom and announcing the good news that grace, mercy and love constitute the abundant life he proclaims. And it is **only** the self-giving love of God that changes us from the inside out. It is **only** the self-giving love of God that sets us free from the many forms of bondage that hold us and imprison us. It is only the love of God that can enable us to live into wholeness and new life.

Live into that love!!