

“Set Free”

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Luke 13:10-17

Luke is the only gospel writer to record Jesus' Sabbath work of healing of the man with a withered hand (6:1-16), the bent over woman (today's passage), and the man with dropsy (14:1-6). Jesus was in his hometown and was asked to preach and he chose Isaiah 42 as his scripture. He quoted:

¹⁸“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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus clearly saw himself as anointed by God to work on the Sabbath or any other day to bring healing and to set people free from that which bound them. Jesus was on a mission to set people free but whenever he sought to fulfill that mission on a Sabbath he encountered conflict. Today's Gospel is an illustration of the fulfillment of his mission and the conflict it brought forth.....Luke 13:10-17:

¹⁰Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And 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. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But 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.” ¹⁵But 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? ¹⁶And 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?” ¹⁷When 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.

Today we will focus on two people who needed Jesus' touch of healing. At times we are very much like these two individuals. First, we have a woman who had been bent over to the point of not being able to stand up straight for eighteen years. That's a long time to be looking at the ground! She doesn't have a name. She's just known as the bent over woman. As far as we know she had been coming to the synagogue for eighteen years yet, chances are, she had few if any friends and certainly no one would have touched her. There was great fear and disdain toward any who had physical deformities. The common reaction was to wonder what sin they had committed to deserve such a punishment. We can safely say that this nameless woman not only brought a bent over body to the synagogue, she also brought a bent over spirit. Her disability had become her identity.....simply known as *the bent over woman*. It's a wonder she continued to come to the synagogue but, then again, she must have had a deep seated kernel of hope that she would meet God in that holy place.

I am glad our society is better recognizing the needs of the disabled by making buildings, sidewalks and public facilities more accessible. We still have a long way to go but, in the last twenty years, we have made real progress in both the practical side of buildings, wheelchairs and technology, as well as the personal side of becoming more accepting of those with disabilities.

Like the woman in our story today we have all experienced seasons in which we have been bound up and bent over in *body, mind* or *spirit*. Life happens and life isn't always positive. Some might be here today bent over with illness, bitterness, hatred, self-loathing, guilt, fighting addictions, lust, envy, grief, greed, fear, overcome with financial/family/career worries and even though others can't see your pain, you know you are struggling to raise your head and you genuinely desire to be set free. I believe Fairmont is a place of healing for you because Jesus Christ is here!

Jesus saw the crippled woman and moved to set her free. He initiated the relationship by, first, speaking to her....possibly the first time anyone had spoken kindly to her in a long time. He said, ***“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”*** He followed the word of hope with a touch of healing and she stood up straight. The woman was made whole by a kind *word* and a gentle *touch* from Jesus. I can’t help but think that Jesus must have experienced great satisfaction that he was fulfilling his calling to set the captives free. As the woman was set free from the ailment she could not *not* praise God....the joy that flooded her soul found its voice in praise! Jesus later called her by a new name.... ***“daughter of Abraham.”*** One of God’s chosen!

Scripture makes it clear that the church is to be a people where all who are bent over can find the grace, love and setting free touch of Jesus Christ. May you experience Jesus’ gentle touch of healing through the love, prayers, people and worship of this church. Bent over people are welcome at Fairmont and Jesus is the One who brings the touch of wholeness which often comes through God’s people!

Now we turn our attention to another person in this story who also needs to be set free. He is simply called the “leader of the synagogue.”

¹⁴But 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.”

This well trained, religious leader was indignant toward Jesus because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. How dare this itinerant preacher work on the Sabbath. Everyone knows you don’t work/heal on the Sabbath. This leader felt confident in the law and he was determined to make the point that Jesus had violated the law. But rather than speak to Jesus directly he took his case to the crowd that Jesus might be exposed as a charlatan and a law-breaker. This religious leader was absolutely sure of his position! He knew the law!

We live in an intolerant day when those who malign and denigrate others for holding a different point of view, are considered brave and courageous. Our society elevates those who see issues as black or white and scorns those who seek better understanding through listening to another's point of view. Many live by the mantra, "*if you don't believe as I do then the heck with you.*"

The synagogue leader was like that. He was so convinced of his position that he totally lost sight of a woman who needed to be set free and he tried to whip up prejudice and antagonism against the One who had brought new life to the woman. While Jesus gently touched the woman, he used a different approach to get the religious leader's attention. He used a verbal two-by-four. Jesus is not always gentle.....especially towards stubborn church people. At times we need Jesus' gentle touch and at other times we need Jesus' two-by-four touch. Listen to Jesus two-by-four approach to the religious leader. **"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?"**

To all who were buying into the narrow mindedness, Jesus said, "***You hypocrites!*** A hypocrite is "*one who pretends to be what he or she is not....one who pretends to be pious or virtuous without being so.*" The religious leader thought God was on his side and that he was doing what was right in God's eyes. But Jesus knew the synagogue leader was a misguided pretender...a leader who needed to be set free from his erroneous belief system. After getting his attention by calling him a hypocrite, Jesus then gave the man a new idea....a new approach that had the potential of setting the man free.

It was pretty simple. As a teaching method, Jesus often asked questions. To the religious leader, Jesus asked a simple question*why is it Okay to unbind and set free your donkey on the Sabbath but not a daughter of Abraham?* Since when did giving a donkey a drink become more important than healing a person? As the people thought about Jesus' question many were set free with a new understanding of God's grace and freedom. We can hope that the synagogue leader was among those who ended up "***rejoicing at all the wonderful things that Jesus was doing.***"

We, like the synagogue leader, are sometimes stuck in our stubbornness and graceless thinking. We think our opinion is the one true opinion and we give no time to listen, really listen, to a contrary point-of-view. We also need Jesus' two-by-four approach to get our attention. I wonder what rules, beliefs, customs, attitudes or habits in our personal lives and our corporate life here at Fairmont need to be changed? What new thoughts does God want us thinking? The scriptures tell us that when we follow Jesus we are like new creation....the old has passed away and the new has come. What old needs to be tossed out? What new needs to be accepted?

One of the books I read while on sabbatical was "***Holy Play: The Joyful Adventure of Unleashing Your Divine Purpose***" written by Kirk Byron Jones a professor at Andover-Newton Theological School in Boston. One of the premises of the book is that we need to have the courage to rethink our view of God. Jones wrote, "***I have just returned to my writing from a Monday morning ritual: taking out the garbage. Along with the usual trash, my collection included an old carpet. The ugly orange piece of rug was, twenty years ago, the glory under someone's feet. But through wear and tear, its original brilliance had dissipated with the years. It occurred to me that the carpet was in a way like our first views of God. They were undoubtedly striking and brought great comfort, a sense of cosmic protection.***" (Page 57) Jones then described several ways in which his early views of God needed to be tossed out like that old, orange carpet and how they had been replaced with new and healthier views of God.

What is old orange carpet in your personal life or in our community life here at Fairmont? What needs to go in order for us to receive Jesus' touch of wholeness? Jesus touched a woman bent over for eighteen years and straightened her into a healthy, rejoicing "daughter of Abraham." Jesus also touched a religious leader bent over with a misguided understanding of God and, we trust, that he was straightened into a healthy, rejoicing "son of Abraham."

Jesus is here.....he is here to set us free! Will we receive his touch?

Amen