

The Eleven Sunday after Pentecost
Grace Episcopal Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville. LA
25 August 2019

Luke 13:10-17

I love this passage from Luke because of the echoes of one of the prototypical Jewish stories in the Hebrew Scripture and that is the story of Exodus and the liberation of God's people. In that case, we are talking about political liberation. In the case today, the theme is Spiritual liberation. In both cases, God's way of saving his people and the woman in our passage is to enter their story of bondage and to liberate them from within. This is what God does. he enters into our story. We could almost summarize our sermon today in one phrase. God chooses to liberate his people and helps them to discover their full humanity by entering into their story!

Today, Jesus enters a crippled woman's story and restores her to her full humanity. This story, which is only found in the gospel of Luke, tells us a few things about Jesus. First, it tells us that **Jesus saw her**. This was a woman others avoided. She was "bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight". By the standards of the day, the woman must have been quite a sinner, for physical ailments were considered a punishment from God for sin. She is a faceless person others avoid. She is described as having a debilitating spirit. She is not given a name. There are no details given about who she was, or who she had been before the osteoporosis, (or the illness that caused the condition.) She is a nobody. Yet, Jesus sees her. He focuses his attention on her, while others are trying hard to avoid her.

Then the passage tells us that **Jesus spoke to her**, "He called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment'." The word here is not "cure" but "liberated, released, set free, untied from bonds, etc." Jesus more than cures the woman. He liberated her from any physical, spiritual, or emotional conditions that held her hostage, that kept her bound, that deprived her of her full identity and her full humanity. We see this because later in the story Jesus calls this woman, "A daughter of Abraham". After he sets her free, she is no longer a faceless someone in the crowd, she is an Israelite, a daughter of Abraham, someone deserving the same promises made by God to all the descendants of Abraham.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing is what Jesus does next, "When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God." ***Jesus touched her.*** Not only does he see her and speak to her, he also offers her his healing touch. Now, this is remarkable. He defiled himself on the Sabbath by touching someone deemed to be impure, and by doing so, he risks angering the authorities of the day. He performs a "work" on a sacred day, where no work was allowed, and this brings him conflict with the synagogue leader. This brings to mind last week's Gospel passage when he said, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" (Luke 12:49-56). By healing this woman, he is in fact purposely challenging the powers of the day.

Luke tells us that, "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'." The leader of the synagogue has a zero tolerance for any violations of the Sabbath Laws. The Sabbath is a day for rest and for worship, no exceptions! He reminds me of the story of a child who was sent to the principal's office for molding his peanut-butter and jelly sandwich into a gun. The teacher in the playground felt the sandwich violated the zero-tolerance police against guns and sent the child to the office.

In a way, I understand the teacher's concerns. Anyone who has children knows how dangerous weapons made out of food can be. Have you ever had a toddler turn a simple meatball into a grenade? Have you ever stepped barefooted on a pile of dry cereal in your child's room? Have you ever drunk milk which had been returned to the refrigerator after spending several days on the counter? Have you ever faced an enemy armed with handfuls of Spaghetti-os? Weapons made out of food can be very dangerous. I agree with a zero-tolerance police. That little could should have been put in jail. Enough is enough with these kids who think they can build canons out of mashed potatoes!

The leader of the synagogue also has a zero tolerance, but in his case it is a zero tolerance to Sabbath breakers. Now, he might be surprised by Jesus' behavior, but we shouldn't be. After all, Jesus has done this behavior several other times in Luke. In chapter 4:31-37 he healed a man with an unclean spirit during the Sabbath, on 6:6-11 he heals a man with a withered hand also on the Sabbath, of course we have the episode today, and then on 14:1-6 he will heal a man with dropsy also on the Sabbath. Jesus is a repeat offender! And he seems to be doing this somewhat purposely. If this woman had been sick for 18 years,

why couldn't Jesus wait just a few more hours and heal her the next day? Why purposely offend the authorities?

The answer is very simple. For Jesus religion was made as a tool for man and not the other way around. God did not say in Genesis, "Let us create a Religion, and then let us create men and women to obey that Religion". Religion was created so that men and women may find appropriate ways to worship the Lord, their God. But humanity comes before even the mandates and rules of religion. Jesus says it well, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath care for your animals? And Shouldn't this daughter of Abraham be more important than your animals?" (My paraphrase). Organized religions often focus more on the external rituals of the faith than they do on the people seating on the pews. But Christ, sees beyond the exterior facades of rituals, and willingly enters the story of humanity. Christ sees us and is not appalled by our sin. Christ calls us to himself and speaks to us silently in our prayer life, through Holy Scripture, and through others we encounter every day. Christ is always willing to liberate us from anything that binds us, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual if we give him the opportunity.

For Christ humanity is more important than ritual. When Jesus looks at this broken, bent-over woman he sees beyond her physical appearance to her humanity. Christ acts to restore that humanity by liberating the woman from anything that kept her bound, including her physical illness. This is great news for me and it should be for you all because, my friends, we are all Quasimodo. Perhaps not in a physical sense, but many us still carry the humps of resentment and anger, the scars of betrayal and loss, the deformities of guilt and shame, the impediments of social isolation, loneliness, addiction, and depression. We are Quasimodo! And the good news is that Christ sees us and is not appalled by our sin and our deformities. The good news is that Christ speaks to us constantly, directly addressing us in our prayer life, through Scripture and through the intervention of others. The Good news is that he offers us his healing touch every day. He seeks to restore and to liberate us. I invite all of you today to place your life in his hands. Christ loves you and seeks to make you whole. Amen!