

Luke 13:10-17

"The Stoopd Woman"

Here's the scene: As Jesus continued making his way toward Jerusalem, he, as was his custom, was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. Suddenly, a woman appears and as we read and hear the Scripture, I want you to take note of a few things:

1. How the text describes the woman.
2. Jesus' actions towards this woman and the result of his action.
3. The woman's reaction.
4. The reaction from the leader of the synagogue.
5. How Jesus confronts the leader.
6. The end results

That's a lot to take note of, but as we will see, there's a lot going on in these seven verses. Hear now the Word of the Lord from Luke, chapter 13, verses 10-17:

10 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.

But 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."

But 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? And 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?"

When 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Did you notice how Luke describes the woman? She had been crippled for eighteen years; bent over and couldn't stand up straight. According to Jesus, she had been bound by Satan. For eighteen long years, she was weak, burdened by her condition, and broken down.

One translation says that she had a "spirit of weakness", a condition perhaps indicative of her status as a mere first century Palestinian woman. Perhaps, she had been so ignored, so silenced and pushed to the margins that it manifested in her physical body. Whether her ailment was physical, spiritual, or a combination of both, the end result was the same: this woman was broken, stooped over and could not see her way up to hope.

How long had she been coming to the synagogue, a place where the people of God gathered for prayer, community, and for listening to an exposition of the Scriptures? How long had she come and heard the promises of God to God's people, but left without those promises being brought to bare in her own life? How long had she been unseen, unheard, under the burden of her affliction, sitting in the midst of all those who would grab hold of blessings for themselves without so much as a care for whether or not she was touched by the healing of God, the blessing of God, or the peace that passes all understanding? How long?

Then, Jesus saw her. And I want us to stay here for just a second and grasp what this means. Jesus didn't just look at this woman, he *saw* her. He was in the middle of teaching, no doubt telling a story or two as he expounded upon the Scriptures, and suddenly someone caught his attention. Right in the middle of his teaching, Jesus' attention was redirected and he saw her.

The Greek root word here is ὁράω (hor-ah-o), which means to perceive, discern, or attend to. So, not only did the woman catch Jesus' attention, he discerned in an instant her deepest needs and attended to her.

And it's very interesting that Luke situates this story between Jesus' teachings about repentance and parables about the kingdom of God. He might just be speaking to a larger narrative about how God's people are supposed to live and act, but that's for another sermon.

Jesus saw the woman and called her over.

Can you imagine what she must have been thinking? She probably hadn't been addressed warmly in those eighteen years. Was she afraid? Was she wondering if this man was going to treat her the same way as most other men probably treated her--with

disdain, assaulting her dignity with disgust in their eyes? Can you imagine how long that walk over to Jesus must have seemed to her?

But instead of oppression, she received healing from Jesus. Instead of rebuke, she heard, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment". Then, the text says, Jesus laid hands on her and immediately, she stood up straight and responded to God's redemptive power with praise.

Then the hater stood up, 'cause you know there's always gonna be a hater somewhere trying to keep somebody down. The sad part is that this particular hater was the leader of the synagogue.

The equivalent of church folk frowning upon your blessing. Church folk who look at you funny when you walk in the sanctuary, like, "What is *she* doing here?" Church folk who are appalled that you sat on their pew, offended that you don't do things *their* way at *their* church. Lord, have mercy.

Did you notice that this hater didn't address Jesus directly, but turned to the crowd? It reminded me of a time when I was a kid and my family and I had gone on vacation to Florida as we did every year. Well, we stopped at this restaurant as we did every year. While we were there, everyone kept asking me to get up and get them food from the buffet. I'm the youngest, so they saw it as their right...my obligation.

Anyway, my mom asked me to get up a few times and finally, I slammed my hands on the table and yelled...to my family..."Y'all got feet!" Then, when I saw that my mom was getting ready to, let's just say, put me back in my place, I quickly added one of my sister's names..."Neesy". I wasn't about to go up against my mom directly!

Same for this leader of the synagogue. He wasn't about to go up against Jesus directly, so he went about it in a roundabout way. Speaking to the crowd, he said, "There are six days on which work ought to be done: come on one of those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day".

In other words, "I'm just letting you all know. This is the sabbath day. Don't be coming up in here expecting to get healed. You should have come on the other days, but today, the sabbath, is not the day." I'm sure she came on the other days too. Where was the healing then? Furthermore, as indignant as he was, he probably didn't want the woman to be healed at all.

Watch what Jesus does next. Jesus answered the leader, but speaking to the crowd, he addressed him in a roundabout way as well. First, he called them, “Hypocrites!” Then Jesus challenged the leader with reason-- “If your animals needed water, wouldn’t you untie them, *on the sabbath*, and lead them to water?

“This is no mere woman; she is a daughter of Abraham, an heir according to the promise, she is a part of a great nation, blessed by YHWH, and she is your sister. Should not she, this woman, this daughter, be set free from the bondage she has endured for eighteen long years *on the sabbath day?*” (*paraphrased*)

You see, while this leader was so concerned about sabbath law and tradition, you know, how we normally do things around here, Jesus was attending to the fact that someone needed deliverance from her bondage.

What good is sabbath rest when those who are bound cannot partake in the rest themselves? And when we have it within our power to help someone, which would give them sabbath, isn’t that what Jesus calls us to do?

Yes, it is a necessity to keep the sabbath--God commands it. However, Jesus calls upon a greater necessity to free human beings from whatever suffering they endure, even on the sabbath, as this is God’s heart and keeping with God’s will.

The text tells us that all who opposed Jesus were put to shame, while the crowd, including the woman, rejoiced at what Jesus was doing. And what was Jesus doing? Well, he was calling people back into wholeness and community, upsetting the religious status quo, and certainly dismantling systems of oppression, even in the holy places.

Now, if I might speak to the girls and women in worship this morning-- Can you relate to the woman in this story? Are you the woman who has been broken and beaten down by life? Have you suffered so much loss and grief that you suffer from a spirit of weakness?

Have you, like so many girls and women across the ages, been oppressed, beaten physically, mentally, and spiritually? Have you, like so many girls and women, felt invisible because you are treated as if you don’t exist?

Have you ever felt pressured to be someone you are not? Have you ever been overworked, underpaid, had to work twice as hard, learn twice as much, put forth way more effort than your male counterparts for less compensation and recognition?

Look, we live in a world where the female body is abused, raped and thrown away; aborted before we can even take our first breaths, passed up, passed over, or passed out...

We live in a world where women's voices are silenced in the academy, silenced in government, silenced in the square and silenced in the church...

We live in a world where women are stooped over, our backs are bent, our feet are tired, and the powers-that-be work overtime to keep us from having a seat at the table...

And just when we are about ready to give up hope, Jesus declares, "Women, you are set free!"

We are seen by God, loved by God, forgiven by God, blessed by God, and we deserve to have our bodies healed, our minds renewed, our voices heard. We deserve, in every manner of speaking, to be set free.

Jesus confers such a blessing on us as women that we are able to stand confidently as daughters of the living God. We stand in the strength of Christ. We fight in the will of Christ. We lead with the wisdom of Christ. We are daughters of the Most High God and we are victorious in the name of Jesus!

And anyone who dares look upon us with disdain and shake a hypocritical finger in our faces and doesn't declare the wonders of God's mighty works will ultimately be put to shame.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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