

Text: Luke 13:10-17

Story: A Healing Story: Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman

Author: Luke

Where: Jesus was teaching in a Synagogue

When: On Sabbath

Luke describes Jesus' teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, but we are not informed about the content of his teaching.

### **Background and situation:**

The passage is Lukan. For the first time since 12:1, we have a change in venue.

Jesus had been speaking to disciples and large crowds. Now, he appears in "one of the synagogues."

The story is one of several in Luke that touch on issues of sabbath and healing.

### **Characters:**

- Jesus
- A woman (nameless) Condition –
  - crippled for 18 years.
  - Bend over and unable to stand up straight,
  - Jesus called her over
  - Jesus laid hands on her
  - Immediately stood up straight
  - Began praising God
- Leader of Sabbath – Indignant (outraged, angry, furious): Why? "Because Jesus had cured on the sabbath"
- Crowd
- Opponents – put to shame
- Entire crowd - rejoicing

## **Emotional Content;**

- Woman praising God
- Leader of the synagogue – indignant (*angry, furious, offended*)
- Opponents – shame
- Entire crowd – rejoicing
- What other emotions?

While the point of view of the biblical author is the most prominent perspective in a text, imaginatively exploring the experiences of one or more characters can raise *helpful interpretive questions* and *contextual insights*.

**WOMAN:** Reading from the perspective of the bent over woman in Luke 13:10-17 is one such example.

A reading from this perspective emphasizes the healing as the crucial starting point of the story.

While this pericope is a story of controversy between Jesus and the synagogue leader, at its core is a healing that demonstrates Jesus' power and his compassion.

From the perspectives of the woman her condition could result from her debilitating condition: neck and back pain, fatigue, difficulty breathing, heart problems related to inflammation of the aorta, and, potentially, feelings of frustration, vulnerability, or isolation. This woman has endured over years what Jesus terms Satanic bondage (verse 16).

## **LEADER OF SYNAGOGUE:**

We must not make him the "bad guy". We could do this easily with this passage, (13:14), without any exploration of why he interprets Sabbath laws as he does.

The synagogue leader, in his role as teacher of Torah, objects to Jesus having performed a healing on the Sabbath.

### Questions of historical setting:

Here we might note a couple of things.

**First**, the synagogue leader's complaint is, on the surface, a faithful reading of the Torah: the seventh day was set aside by God for Israel's rest, and work was prohibited on the Sabbath. (e.g., Exodus 31:14).

**Second**, Jesus' response is not a rejection of the Torah rulings about the Sabbath. Instead, he argues from legitimate allowances of restricted kinds of "work" on the Sabbath (13:15). These kinds of discussions were common in Jewish dialogue regarding the Sabbath. In an honour/shame society, like first-century Palestine, this public shaming of the local synagogue leader is not good ... for him or for his ability to lead this religious and social community in this small village.

**JESUS:** We hear the compassionate tone in Jesus' defence for healing on the Sabbath when he argues from lesser to greater: if compassion is shown to one's animals on the Sabbath by providing them water, *"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?"* (13:16).

I think it's fascinating that Jesus found this lady in a synagogue. Why was she there?

Was she a faithful attender, every Sabbath, year in and year out? Or was she just there occasionally, such as when a visiting rabbi was scheduled to speak?

Then Jesus argues *for* healing on the Sabbath based on the great worth of the woman as "a daughter of Abraham" and the appropriateness of healing on the Sabbath.

What better day to heal (bring freedom) than on the Sabbath?

Jesus' perspective on the Sabbath as a day for deliverance is vindicated,

as Luke narrates the humiliation of Jesus' opponents and the joy of the crowds at his wonderful (healing) deeds (13:17).

Although we do not hear about the woman who has been healed at the end of the passage, the praise she offers to God (*doxazo*; 13:13) reverberates with the crowds' rejoicing (*chairō*; 13:17).

### **What's the point of the Story?**

This story is not told to discuss that theological issue. This is not a theological debate about the origins of illness and physical deformities. Rather this is a story about the role and function of our religious traditions, our claims about what could and should be practiced on the "Sabbath" or who is allowed within the walls of our synagogues and religious communities. Sometimes special religious practices may become hindrances to inclusion. We must be diligent to recognize what theological ideas we hold dear that disallow full participation from others.

And Luke's Jesus could not be clearer or more consistent on this point. He's no Sabbath breaker! He operates well within Jewish tradition of the day. But he is also not one to allow the tradition to exclude people from access to the community and the potential for their healing. Many in the crowd agree. These are stories about community.

### **Few questions for us:**

What kind of community do we want to be? And do religious traditions help us to become that kind of community or do they hinder our desires? Will our traditions hinder the "daughter of Abraham" in our day, from joining us today?

### **Reflections**

There are days; you know the kind of days, the days when we can see ourselves as this woman. There are days when I wonder when the burdens of life became so heavy that I became crushed by them. When and where did my childish enthusiasm for life disappear? When did I stop running toward life? When did I become so cautious? When did I let my many tasks bear down on me and cause me to just tramp on.

When did I stop demanding answers and resolve to carry my burdens in silence?

When did I settle into the routine that life offered? There are days when even the small tasks seem difficult and just getting out of bed is more than I can manage.

Days when my burdens weighed me down.

**And there are other days** when I can see myself as the leader in the synagogue.

Those days when I acted as gate keeper to traditions. Or when some rule somewhere is tossed aside or trampled on and I can't hold my tongue.

And there are those days when I self-righteously quote scripture at some poor sod who has gotten under my skin. Those horrid days when I can't summon up the grace to be anything more than just a hypocrite.

Sadly, there are even days, when I want to cling to the rules, because the rules are familiar and the rules provide order, and the rules mean I don't have to think and I can just put myself on automatic pilot and all will be well.

And then there are those glorious days, when the burdens of life are lifted and I want to dance with the pure joy of life and praise God without ceasing. And we've all had those days when we have been set free to be the people God intended us to be and we can't help but sing God's praise.

But if this were just a story where you could relate to a crippled woman who is healed and a few hypocrites who want to spoil the party it would just be an ordinary story and we could, depending on the kind of day we are having be satisfied with identifying ourselves as either blessed or burdened.

But this is not just an ordinary story.

Because we are gathered here in this place; and here in the church, which is the Body of Christ, each of us is called to be Christ to one another.

Which means that in addition to identifying ourselves with the one who is healed

and the ones who are hypocrites, we are also called to identify ourselves with Christ for we are called to be healers. We are called to set one another free! We are called to lift one another's burdens! We are called to lift the burdens of injustice, disease, sadness, poverty, and even the burdens of death.

Like Christ, we are called to challenge the religious practices and beliefs of our day that are insensitive to peoples' suffering.

We worship a God who created us to stand up full and free and have the courage to look God in the eye and to ask God to share our burdens.

We worship a God that wants us to stand tall and look one another in the eyes; set one another free, call one another to account and rejoice in God's steadfast abundant grace.

So do not let your burdens weigh you down.

Do not let rules and regulations and law turn you into self-righteous hypocrites.

Rise up! Rise up, look around and in the faces of your sisters and brothers see the face of Christ and let them see the face of Christ that is in you.