

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

August 21, 2021(Proper 16, Year C)
Luke 13:10-17

I posted this on Facebook.

(Show picture "Love and scripture 2")

It says, "The difference between me and you is you use scripture to determine what love means, and I use love to determine what scripture means."

The woman Jesus meets in our Gospel today would say, "It's a TREMENDOUS difference."

So, let's take a closer look at these two people. First the woman. Jesus was teaching in a synagogue when she appeared with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years. She was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. I wonder if the spirit's NAME was scoliosis. Or perhaps osteoporosis. Or maybe it wasn't just physical.

I heard of a woman who described herself as "the incredible shrinking woman." Her marriage was falling apart. Their business was going broke. Her three young children were demanding more time than she had to give. One had learning disabilities. She was seeing her life disappear. She no longer knew who she was. Could that have been the plight of the "bent-over" woman? Was she a "shrinking"?

Or maybe the demon name was depression, or guilt, or shame, or addiction, or fear, or resentment. WHATEVER it WAS that KEPT her eyes on the ground, Jesus describes her condition as being in BONDAGE. So, if YOU'VE ever needed to be HEALED, if you've had LONG ordeals in your life that were such a BURDEN that you felt BENT OVER by the WEIGHT of it, then you might see YOURSELF in this woman.

And one of the AMAZING things about this story is that the woman never ASKED to be healed! In numerous OTHER stories in the gospels, people ASK, or their FRIENDS ask FOR them, or their parents or family ask. Or sometimes they make such a nuisance of themselves that it's OBVIOUS that they need some help. But not so with THIS woman. Jesus just HEALS her, WITHOUT her even ASKING for it. Jesus saw her bent over, and he touched her, and "immediately she stood up straight and began to praise God."

It's as if Jesus is saying, "I SEE you. I see your PAIN. I see what you're GOING through. And I want you to know that I'm HERE. And I LOVE you."

There is tremendous POWER in just BEING SEEN, being KNOWN, being LOVED, being ACCEPTED.

And Jesus goes a step further. Not only does Jesus HEAL her, he RESTORES her to her COMMUNITY. Here is a woman who, for 18 LONG years, has been BLAMED for her OWN illness, who at BEST was INVISIBLE, considered USELESS, NOTHING, and at WORST, JUDGED and EXCLUDED. But JESUS gives her a NAME. He calls her by a highly COMPLEMENTARY title, "Daughter of Abraham." Very much like the term we CHRISTIANS use, "Child of God."

"Child of God, I SEE you."

But the leader of the SYNAGOGUE – he couldn't SEE this MIRACLE; all HE saw was somebody breaking a rule, and he was indignant. He kept saying to the crowd over and over, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

I'd like you to see something.

(Show "Church Pew Bar Stool - A CALL FOR LOVE")

We agree with that so much HERE that when we built this sanctuary, we took some of the church pews out entirely, and put in chairs.

You know, Facebook is in an interesting place to have discussions. I have been in many disagreements with other pastors about the STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF RULES. They say “if a child isn’t old enough, they can’t commune”; “if a person hasn’t been baptized, they can’t commune”; “if a person isn’t a member, they can’t get married in a church.” And I say, “look at JESUS.” Jesus NEVER REFUSED grace to ANYONE.

Jesus understood the Sabbath as MORE than a tradition. For Jesus, the Sabbath was the symbol of God’s POWER, of the PERFECTION of creation, of WHOLENESS. What more APPROPRIATE gesture could there BE than to RESTORE wholeness to one of God’s CHILDREN ON that Sabbath.

This DAY, and PARTICULARLY WORSHIP, is not intended to KEEP you COMFORTABLE. There’s a SAYING that Jesus came to COMFORT the afflicted and AFFLICT the comfortable. Either way, when you encounter Jesus, he CHANGES you. Jesus comforted the suffering woman and AFFLICTED the COMFORTABLE religious leader. Jesus never LEAVES you the way he FINDS you. He LOVES you JUST the way you are, but TOO MUCH to LEAVE you that way.

That should be your expectation of worship, that Jesus will touch your life in some way, that he’ll CHANGE your life. You’re not here to go through the motions; you’re here to have your eyes opened, so you can SEE God’s grace at work. You’re not here to just SHOW UP; you’re here to be RAISED up, to stand up straight and praise your God.

So when you go out from this place today, you have 2 options -- you can either go shaking your head in contempt, or you can join that crowd at that END of the story, “rejoicing at all the wonderful things” he has done. It’s YOUR choice. COMPLAIN or CELEBRATE; the LETTER of the LAW or LOVE.

Either way, Jesus SEES you, as you TRULY are. And JESUS ALWAYS chooses LOVE.

Hear the word of our Lord: “Child of God, I SEE you. I see your pain. I know what you’re going through. And I love you.” Amen.