

Year C  
Third Sunday After Pentecost  
Service of Morning Prayer  
Luke 13:10-17

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

The news lately has stirred up communities all over the country—even going out to dinner last night we went through a demonstration on the Winchester walking mall. I'm not a political activist, and I have no plans to preach politics from this pulpit. There are people on **all** sides of every issue who are well-meaning, and who have good reasons for believing what they believe. We all know, and possibly even love, people who disagree with us on important issues. So I'm not going to tell you how to vote, or what issues to support, or what to condemn.

What I will do, is preach the gospel. I will talk about Jesus, and his radical idea of loving everyone. What I hope you will do is to take this seriously, perhaps especially when it challenges something that you think, or do, or say. If the gospel makes you uncomfortable, sit with that for a few minutes, and wonder what God might be saying to you.

Today's gospel, for instance, isn't like some of the miraculous healing stories that we've seen. First of all, Jesus is in a synagogue, and Luke only puts Jesus in a synagogue twice. The first time was 9 chapters ago, when Jesus was home at the synagogue in Nazareth, and he read the lesson from the scroll of Isaiah—remember? That's when he said that **he** was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: the person who would "bring good news to the poor...release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free." In a way, that passage from Isaiah has been the agenda for his ministry, so now he is in a synagogue again, and he is doing exactly what he said he would do. The disabled woman has been held captive by an evil spirit for 18 years. For this long time she's been unable to stand up because of the demon. In this state she would have been a social outcast, very much on the margins of society. Unlike some of the people Jesus has healed, she is not cured because of her great faith, or her good works—in fact, she doesn't even ask to be healed, nor does anyone else ask for her. Jesus simply calls her to him and says, "woman, you are set free from your ailment." Then he lays his hands on her, and suddenly she can stand up. Notice that Jesus draws her from the margins, back into the center of the community, reintegrating her, once again. Her response is to immediately begin praising God, which perhaps draws even greater attention to the miracle. It seems almost effortless for Jesus to do this, and this time, there was no wrangling with the demon beforehand. He simply *sets her free* to be whole again.

The leader of the synagogue plays the by now familiar role of clueless, hypocritical authority figure; instead of being delighted that the woman is healed, and joining her in praising God, he's worried that Jesus has healed—basically performed work—on the sabbath. He's worried that, because Jesus has broken the sabbath commandment, others might get it into their heads that it's okay to come to be cured

that day, as well. “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on *those* days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day,” he says. Notice he is saying this to the public, hoping to reassert his authority, but he doesn’t dare challenge Jesus directly. Most Jews hearing the synagogue leader would probably acknowledge that observation of the sabbath was a part of their cultural identity, but they would also know that there were exceptions to the rule.

Jesus points to these exceptions. “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?” Essentially he’s saying that they are allowed to untie—to free from bondage—their animals on the sabbath day, so a daughter of Abraham, who is much more important than a donkey or an ox, should be allowed to be freed from bondage on the sabbath, as well. Jesus shows that the leader of the synagogue, in spite of his position of authority, doesn’t really know how to interpret scripture; the leader is forgetting that the law exists for people—people don’t exist for the law. And when Jesus “said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.”

Jesus wasn’t about overturning the law, but about fulfilling it. Again and again he helped people to understand that God’s kingdom was about giving life, about setting people free, about bringing people back into right relationship (with God, and with one another), and about love. He showed us a foretaste of the kingdom—he even said it was at hand. We can work to help the kingdom break in, if we do it together.

It’s a human tendency to avoid conflict. We can isolate ourselves from people we don’t agree with. We can also clash with them, too, of course. But we don’t have to. We **can** be in relationship with people we disagree with. We can sit next to them at church. We can listen—listen to understand, not to reply. We can pray. We can work together to make a society that respects the dignity of every human being. Jesus shows us the way.

Amen

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