

**Sermon – Luke 13: 10-17 Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman**  
**Sunday, August 22, 2010, in Hermosa, South Dakota**

**Gospel Text: Luke 13: 10-17 - Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman**

Now he 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.

**SERMON:**

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.*  
*- 1 Corinthians 1:3*

**PRAYER:** Dear God, we thank you for bringing us together today...be with us as we listen and reflect on your Word...bring your healing grace into our hearts so that we might hear your Word and our spiritual self may be healed...and we may walk along side our neighbors. In your Almighty gracious and loving name we pray...Amen.

It's Sunday morning...every chair in the synagogue is full as the teacher engages the audience before him...sharing the Good News. Slowly, a woman enters, hunched over, bent in such a way that she has been crippled for 18 long excruciating years. Her posture suggests she is in bondage and oppression. She is under the power of an evil spirit...a spirit of infirmity. On this morning, she enters the synagogue in Nazareth to listen to the teacher. She does not come expecting miracles...or to be healed.

But Jesus sees her in the crowd...and reaches out to her...calling her to come forward, he says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When Jesus lays his hands on her, she immediately stands up straight – pain free for the first time 18 years! She is filled with joy and begins praising God.

Satan had bound this woman...who knew she could NOT lift herself up, however, Christ's power is superior to that of Satan. Christ could lift her up, and enable her to lift her self up. The bent over woman knew that it was only God that could loosen the bondage of her ailment; and now, feeling that she is free, she gives glory to God!

How many of us sitting here today wish we could be like the woman...being healed of our physical ailments? Often, when we are sick...the medical professionals are focused on healing our illness or injury. But where is God in our lives and how often do we seek out God? How often do we as Christians turn to our neighbor and bring the spiritual healing into the equation?

As part of my seminary education, this summer I took a unit of CPE – Clinical Pastoral Education...essentially learning how to be a pastor in a clinical setting. Part of my training included visiting members of my church who were in the hospital. It was an amazing and eye-opening experience to intentionally walk beside people during their toughest days...bringing God into their lives as they dealt with their mental or physical ailment...and watching as they found strength, comfort and compassion from our Lord and Savior. God did not always answer the prayers of physical healing... but walking with Jesus brought them the strength and courage to face their trials and tribulations...and they knew they were not alone in their ordeal.

When Jesus turns to those he physically and spiritually heals with the commendation, “Your faith has made you whole,” he recognizes the faith it takes to come, ask and undertake the arduous work of becoming whole – in spiritual body.

I’m guessing the woman in the synagogue was the most surprised person of all that day by Jesus’ healing touch. When Jesus’ eyes rested on the woman, they were gentle and full of compassion. She had not sought out a cure...but Jesus saw her and he knew what needed to be done...and He did something to help –WITHOUT being asked.

Moved by compassion, Jesus heals this woman...

Compassion...Theologian Frederick Buechner says, “Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it’s like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”

What would you do if such a woman walked into church today? What would you do if you saw someone with a physical ailment in the grocery store or on the sidewalk?

Often, we look away! Looking requires presence, which requires energy that opens up the possibility that we need the people next to us for life, or as one theologian put it - “We have to bring ourselves out, and we have to let the other in. And sometimes life is a lot easier without being in community. When we as members of the church...members of one body and individuals sharing one call...take time to allow the eyes of our neighbors to catch our own? Healing is made possible through Christ. Vision is restored...Having been seen by God; will we now see?” (G. Thomas Martin).

It was on the Sabbath that Jesus healed the disfigured woman in the synagogue. This is one more instance that we hear of Jesus bucking the systems and the laws of the day...here Jesus shows the people gathered in the synagogue that Sabbath

observance was to be a blessing to them... not a burden that prevented their doing good deeds.

Jesus is moved by compassion to heal the woman...and by doing so he shows the leaders of the synagogue – and us – that God's kingdom is a kingdom of people, not laws...God is almighty and loving. Jesus reveals a God for whom the well being of this woman is of greater importance than law or doctrine.

Jesus' power and compassion...as well as his insistence of love over legalism is central to this woman's life, the lives of those people gathered in the synagogue, and in our own lives.

We see a Lord who demands our obedience in response to Christ's healing touch. We have all been released! What will you do when you are healed? The challenge is: How will you serve?

The challenge for the church is to be in relationship with people like the woman: That woman is today's neighborhood alcoholic, the down trodden homeless person, the drug addict, or the misunderstood unique person sitting in the back pew. These people enable us to feel better than they...but we often don't do much to change their lives.

In our human condition – sometimes we just don't want to see the person standing next to us. We do not want to interact with someone who may bug us, annoy us or inconvenience us. How often have we gone to great lengths to avoid strangers because then we are not culpable? We pass by the homeless because it alleviates us of the burden of responsibility.

In Fargo, I work for Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. The mission of Lutheran Social Services – in North Dakota AND South Dakota is: Inspired by God's love, we care for, support and strengthen individuals, families and communities. Each year, more than 54,000 times lives of South Dakotans are touched by LSS' programs and services.

As church relations coordinator, I see the work of counselors as they help individuals who are broken and poor in spirit and physical body; I see the work of counselors helping broken families work to repair their relationships; and I see staff and volunteers stepping in and helping communities rebuild after a disaster.

The president of Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota sums up the task of Lutheran Social Services in this way: Life's challenges are our greatest opportunity to experience God's grace. If we accept the importance of these challenges, then Lutheran Social Services' task is not to eliminate them, but to make them more manageable and less overwhelming.

Susan wanted to be a typical 15-year old girl – hanging out with friends, playing on the volleyball team and living in a home where she felt loved and secure. However...on her

bad days she wanted to find a way...any way...to hurt herself and end her life. She tried overdosing on sleeping pills, getting drunk, skipping school and ending her life.

Unfortunately, Susan's situation is not uncommon. Luther Hall in Fargo, North Dakota, is a psychiatric residential treatment facility for children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 18 who need 24-hour care and treatment. The staff and counselors at Luther Hall – and Canyon Hills in Spearfish – see young people like Susan all the time.

For young people like Susan, suffering severe and complex emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric disorders...often a psychiatric facility such as Luther Hall or Canyon Hills is their only hope that life will someday return to normal. Day by day the staff walked with Susan in her hopelessness. Eleven months later...Susan was sober and clean. She moved back home with her family...returned to school and began playing on the volleyball team.

Theologian Parker Palmer says there is a fundamental human need for “bounded, safe and trustworthy communal spaces where the soul is welcomed and invited to show up, to speak its truth and to make its claim on the living of our lives.”

These days we are bombarded with tragic events...newspapers, TV news and the Internet tell us daily, even hourly, what tragedies have occurred locally, nationally and internationally. How can we see so much suffering and be moved to compassion as Jesus repeatedly was?

In his book, “Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life”, Henry Nowen offers this advice: “In the Christian community, we can keep our eyes and ears open to all that happens without being numbed by technological overstimulation or angered by the experience of powerlessness. ... In the Christian community we gather in the name of Christ and thus experience him in the midst of a suffering world. There our old, weak minds, which are unable fully to perceive the pains of the world, are transformed into the mind of Christ, to whom nothing human is alien. Our fears and anger are transformed by God's unconditional love...and we become gentle manifestations of God's boundless compassion. ... As long as we depend on our own limited resources, the world will frighten us and we will try to avoid the painful spots. But when we become participants in God's compassion, we can enter the most hidden corners of the world...and perform the same works Christ did. Wherever true Christian community is formed, compassion happens in the world.”

Yes...We need Jesus to point out our blind spots and correct them. We need him to show up where we need to grow in love. We need him to straighten us just like he did with the woman in the synagogue and the synagogue leaders. We need to come together in Christian community, participants in God's compassion.

Amen!

*And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ. Amen. (Philippians 4:7).*