

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 13:10-21
“Standing Tall Again”

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(First After Pentecost/ Trinity Sunday)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 13:10-21 "STANDING TALL AGAIN"

Healing + Sabbath Controversy + 2 Kingdom Parables

1) vv.10-21 RESTORATION OF THE BENT WOMAN ON THE SABBATH AND TEACHING.

//4:16-21, This Story Found Only In Luke (L)

a) v.10 Jesus Teaches The People In The Synagogue On The Sabbath Before The Deliverance.

Ritual Boundary (day/place) , Sabbath 5x: (vv.10, 14 [2x], 15, 16)

10 1 Now he (Jesus) was teaching in one of the synagogues **on the sabbath**. //14:1-6, Last Time In Synagogue In Luke 4:31-37, 6:6-11, Teaching Is Setting For Kingdom Deed

b) vv.11-13 Healing Of The Bent Woman/ Spirit Of Infirmary/ Eighteen Years.

Gift Of Discernment/ Physiological Presentation Of Cosmic Disorder!

11 1 And behold, there was a **woman** 13:4 Lev. 21:18-20, No Suggestion Of Moral Failure, Casualty
Woman who had had **a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years**; // 11:20, Source = Spirit, Acts 10:48, 16:16, 26:18
2 she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. *Spondylitus Ankylopoietica? Hysteria?*

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, **Did Not Ask, Discernment Of God's Work**

1 "Woman, you are freed/*loosed* (i.e. by God) from your infirmity!" 4:18, Action No. 1: Initiative/ No Prayer

13 2 And he laid his hands upon her, **Action No. 2: Touch (4:40, 5:13, 8:54, 14:4, 22:51)**
and immediately she was made straight, 1:64, 4:39, 5:25, 8:44,47, 55, 18:43, Result 1: Verified

Clearly A Miracle Of God's Love/Power

3 and she praised God. //v.17b, 5:26-27, 7:16, 17:15, 18:43, Result 2: Response = Gratitude To God
Undoes Work Of Evil One, Jesus Does Not Address The Spirit Directly

c) v.14 Sabbath Controversy: Observance Has Priority Over Everything.

Religiosity Offended, Doing His Job!

Man 14 1 But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed **on the sabbath**. **Identity**
said to the people, **Not Dispute Power! Deflected Anger/ Triangulation**

2 "There are six days on which work *ought* (*dei*) to be done; **Claims To Interpret Scripture**

3 come on those days and be healed, and not **on the sabbath day**." **Ex. 20:9-10, Dt. 5:13-14**
"Bent Out Of Shape" In Spirit, Not Body

c') v.15 Sabbath Controversy: Compassion Has Priority (Minor To Major Argument).

Controversy Dialog Framed With Miracle Story

15 1' Then the Lord answered him, **Jesus As Lord Has Authority, Speaks For God**
"You hypocrites! **12:1-3, m. Shabbat 5, Good News/Bad News**

Question 1 2' Does not each of you **on the sabbath** untie (*loose*) his ox or his ass from the manger,

3' and lead it away to water it? (Of course!) **Show Compassion On Property**
m. Yoma 8:6, Rabbis Allowed Healing In Crises On The Sabbath

b') vv.16-17 Commentary On Healing And Responses/ Satan/ Eighteen Years.

Divine Necessity? Argument: Minor To Major, Dt. 5:13

16 1 And *ought not* (*ouk dei*) this **woman**, "a daughter of Abraham" **Covenant People/ She Is Restored!**

2 whom **Satan bound for eighteen years**, //4:31-37, 4:3-39, 4:18, 40-41, Source = Satan's Stall

Question 2 3 be *loosed* from this bond **on the sabbath day**?" **She's God's Property! Why Can't He Untie Her?**
Not Rules But Who Rules, Satan Works On Sabbath! Why Not God?

17 - As he said this, "all his adversaries were put to shame;" **Is. 45:16, She Was Cured; They Were Not**

+ and all the people *rejoiced at all the glorious things* that were done by him. **7:29-30, Jesus Brings Division**
7:16, 12:51-53, Cosmic Battle: Ex. 34:10, Dt. 10:21,

a') vv.18-21 Jesus Teaches The People After The Deliverance: Two Parables As Commentary.

Luke Often (42x) Pairs Men/ Women

(1) vv.18-19 Parable Of The Mustard Seed: Man As Lead. Mk. 4:30-32, Mt. 13:31-33 (Q)

Questions 3, 4 18 He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?" **Double Question**

19 It is like a grain of mustard seed which a **man** took and sowed in his garden; **Answer: Familiar Metaphor**

Man and it grew and became a tree, **Royal Rule → Peasant Village Imagery**
and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." **Found A Home, Variety Of Fowl (Nations: Ezek. 31:6, 17:23)**

This Kingdom Thing Starts Small, Is Going To Get Large!

(2) vv.20-21 Parable Of The Leaven: Woman As Lead. Small/Big Contrast

Mt. 13:33, GT 96, 42 Passages On Women In Luke!

Question 5 20 And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?" **Single Combined Question**

21 It is like leaven which a **woman** took and hid in three measures of flour, **50 lbs., Answer: Familiar Metaphor**

Woman till it was all leavened." **Small To Large, Hidden Power To Manifest Results**

We See Where History Is Headed! Yeast Is Small, Unseen, Powerful, Just Like God's Kingdom!

Jesus Assumes He Has Authority To Teach What God's Kingdom Is Like From The Inside

A Brief Treatments Of Luke 13:10-21

This thought unit is a healing within the larger journey to Jerusalem and occurs in an unnamed synagogue. The surface structure is a 6:2 concentric pattern (a-b-c // c'-b'-a'). At the center (c.v.14 // c' v.15) is a controversy dialog between the synagogues leader and Jesus over sabbath practice and who speaks for God. The leader(s) accuses Jesus of being a law-breaker and false prophet; he accuses them of missing God as *hypocrites*. In the next outward layer (b. vv.11-13 // b' vv.16-17) the healing of the bent woman is first told, then reviewed in parallel language (*woman, spirit/Satan, eighteen years, loosed from infirmity/loosed from bond, she praises God/all the people rejoiced*). She is restored (v.13), and division follows (v.17). In the outer frame (a. v.10 // a' vv.18-21) Jesus teaches God's kingdom in which small beginnings have great endings. Also noteworthy is the Lucan pairing of a woman (v.11) and man (v.14a) in the healing and controversy and also in the twin parables (vv.18-19 *a man*, vv.20-21 *a woman*). Note the five uses of *sabbath* (vv.10, 14 (2x), 15, 16) and the five questions Jesus poses (vv.15b, 16c, 18 (2x), 20). The universality of *all* is found four times near the end (vv.17 [3x], 21). The healing and controversy (vv.10-17) are found only in Luke (L). The concluding paired parables (vv.18-21) have a Q parallel (Mt. 13:31-33). Luke has taken a healing and controversy story and wrapped it images of Jesus as a kingdom teacher (a. v.10 // a/ vv.18-21). In him word and deed are dual witnesses; lecture and lab go together.

Luke's setting is one we've seen before (4:31-37, 6:6-11). As a notable prophet and miracle worker Jesus is invited to read and speak, but no text is given (cf. 4:16-20). The clue to his topic is withheld till the end of the unit (i.e. *the kingdom of God*). Here we see the Agent of God with the people of God on the day of God in the house of God reading the Word of God under the light of the Spirit of God, Something's about to happen! Jesus teaches as he applies Scripture, teaches in his sensitivity to guidance from above, teaches as he translates true words into mighty deeds, teaches in his readiness to correct synagogue leaders, teaches in his affirmation of the nameless woman as *a daughter of Abraham*; teaches in his twin kingdom parables at the end. All he is and does is instructive, so pay close attention to our Rabbi.

A crippled woman appears as signaled by the word *behold*. Both a spiritual (*spirit of infirmity*) and physical (*bent over...*) diagnosis are given since Dr. Jesus sees more than one level. Living East of Eden with all its physical complications means living on occupied territory ruled at present by Satan whom Jesus overthrows. The natural and the cosmic are associated, but precise causation is not offered. She is under spiritual oppression but not overt demonization as in other cases, a casualty in a larger, multi-level conflict. That Jesus *saw* her is not just by her being stooped but by the Spirit's direction. His words- a prayer of command- also come from above to announce what God is doing, "Woman, you *are loosed* (passive voice = *by God*) from your infirmity." He addresses the spiritual bondage first, then the physical through touch, "and immediately she *was made* (again passive voice) straight." She then praises God, thus identifying the One who worked so powerfully through Jesus. Jesus saw, spoke, and touched in obedience, but *the energy* came from above, which the synagogue ruler missed since he charges Jesus with working on the sabbath. Rather, it was God who worked! Rabbis allowed medical care for crises, but her situation was chronic; Jesus should have waited. That the ruler spoke to the people and not the Lord reveals his judgment of Jesus as a false prophet from whom people must be protected by an authority. Jesus' sharp reply and question ask why they treat animals (ass/ox) better than a sister, *a daughter of Abraham*. If the lesser, then the greater. Jesus shames the leader(s); the people are delighted by the healing and his reasoning. He is a synagogue divider. Jesus fulfills the deep meaning of the Sabbath which is liberation from bondage and *bendage!* Having taught about the kingdom (v.10) and displayed its mercy and judgment (vv.11-17), Jesus now asks and answers questions about God's surprising activity where small beginnings have huge effects. The intent of the kingdom is universal, a new home for all peoples, and plenty of fresh bread!

STANDING TALL AGAIN

“Woman, you are freed from your infirmity!”

Jesus liberates another captive in his kingdom mission to recapture planet earth.

LUKE 13:14

It was October of 2009, about four months before my father’s death in January of 2010, that I drove from Hartsville to meet him in Florence for another round of chemo. The leukemia was by now far advanced. Edema in his extremities was threatening congestive heart failure, and so Lasix was the remedy, which meant many trips to the bathroom. He was on a walker by now, and somewhat hunched from back problems that came- in part- from bending over an examining table at an odd angle for five decades. I was sitting beside his recliner and trying to untangle the IV lines when he asked, “Can you help me down the hall?”

Between us and the bathroom was a long hallway with two therapy rooms on the right, so with his walker and IV-on-wheels off we went. As we passed the first door, a voice called out, “Dr. Jim.” It was then I witnessed a transformation. He stood tall again, lifted his walker over the threshold and called this former patient by her first and last names, though he’d not seen her in a decade. There she lay, an African American woman in her seventies, receiving the same precious poison that flowed into his veins. When he introduced me, she said:

“Your father and I used to work together. I was with D.S.S. Whenever we found an abused child, we brought them to him for an exam. He was so kind and gentle with the little ones. It’s why we used him.”

I never knew that; my heart filled with gratitude, my eyes with tears. It embarrassed him a bit to have his secrets told, so he interrupted her revelations of their thirty year partnership by pulling her medical chart up in his head and asking several pertinent questions about her family and other health conditions. He then turned and we made our way on down the hall, his shoulders stooped again with the effort.

As we passed room No. 2 another voice spoke up, “Dr. Thrailkill,” only this time a man’s. Once again I saw the old doc rise to the occasion by standing up as straight as he could for the next surprise. This was a man whose son died twenty five years earlier in a car wreck, and when the boy died my Father was with him in the ER. They talked, and I could tell it brought consolation to the man in the recliner with a needle in his arm that my father remembered his boy’s name. He again pulled up the chart in his head and surprised the man with his recall of details. He smiled “John, I don’t know which one’s gonna kill us first, the cancer or the chemo!” Both chuckled, and our pilgrimage resumed. By now I was wondering what was next, and with both hands I lifted the IV pole over the door jam, aiming not to pull it loose.

At the end of the hall to the right was a bookshelf with large basket of hand-knitted shawls and caps for cancer patients. When I looked at the sign and saw they were gifts from the church I served in Hartsville- a ministry I did not know about- I knew that whatever happened, we were going to be all right. If the Lord could reveal himself down a cancer hallway in three successive revelations which made an old dying man stand up straight and helped his son to keep on believing, he could be trusted for the rest. For a moment he stood a little taller, and so did I!

I will never forget the strange providence that met us that afternoon as we walked down a hallway in the valley of the shadow of death. When broken human beings stand tall again because of Jesus’ restorative power and love, there we have a window into the new world of God’s kingdom where all will be well, and where we- for the first time- we be fully and completely alive without impediment and fully present to God and one another without fear or misunderstanding. Love will reign forever as we live within the circle and in the full vision of the Holy Trinity illumining all creation from within. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” is now a plea from contested territory, then it shall be so.

It was not until death that my father heard the announcement Jesus make to the woman, “You are loosed from your infirmity.” The fact is that all healing in this life, as much as we desire and seek it, and as marvelous as it is when it breaks through in medical or other means, is temporary and a partial preview of the new freedom that comes for disciples at death and then, at the end of the age, the gift of an indestructible and beautiful resurrection body like that of Jesus.¹ Wise Christians use

¹ On two-stage post mortem existence, which is the classic Christian confession, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), a book I

all the resources God provides: the ordinary, the extraordinary, the scientific and the supernatural. I believe prayer and a readiness to receive the gifts of the Spirit that continue Jesus’ work of revelation and power are one of those extraordinary tools we seek to recover. I am a *both/and* kind of Christian who resists false alternatives,² so pray when you take your medicine because the Creator is our Savior; the one who knows all about you is the one who shows up with the face of Jesus.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

It is important when reading the Gospels to notice that Jesus did not have a one-size-fits-all mentality. His approach to broken people- and that means all of us- was multi-dimensional and customized by the guidance of the Father through the Holy Spirit for each new encounter. The visible member of the Trinity was in intimate and open communication with the Father above through the Spirit within so his every word and deed were synchronized with the divine purpose, as he admitted in John 5:19 where he revealed his mode of operations, “...the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he *sees* the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.” Jesus saw and copied, heard and spoke, waited and listened always and did not act independently out of inward or outward pressure. There were patterns in his work, but you never get the sense Jesus was working a technique; rather, he was relying on a relationship of constant dependence which is why it was never the same two times in a row. Sins he forgave. Ignorance of God he removed through teaching and storytelling. Shortages he supplied. Nature in chaos he subdued. Fear he displaced with love. Bad religion he exposed and sometimes ridiculed in public- as in today’s sabbath controversy. Sicknesses of all kinds he healed. And demons- when they were a factor, which they were not always- he named and expelled.³ Today we first hear of a *spirit of infirmity*, then later how this presence was used by Satan to bind a woman for eighteen years, the precise details of which escape us, only that Jesus saw beneath her surface presentation to a deeper matrix of influence, or as one clever

read and reread. On the resurrection, see my *Resurrection: A Pastor’s Reading of the Major New Testament Resurrection Passages* (Fort Valley, GA: Bristol House, 2014).

² In a polarized church, Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim’s book *Both-And* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2013) is a welcome alternative.

³ For a state of the art scholarly appraisal, see Darrell Bock, editor, *Who Is Jesus* (New York, NY: Howard, 2012), Chapter 6, “Jesus And Exorcism,” 79-92.

commentator put it, “Hers was a physiological presentation of a cosmological disorder,”⁴ which is a way of saying every human disorder has an implicit spiritual dimension since we all swim in the same soup and live in a world not presently under God’s full rule where *the environmentals* influence us all. Jesus saw the whole person: visible and invisible, surface and depth, physiological and cosmological.

Jesus took the Evil One seriously and his work of spoiling whatever God made good, and the leach would be removed. The kingdom Jesus announced in Word he also demonstrated in Deeds of power and liberation with each changed life a new seed or fresh bit of yeast that would have enormous effects beyond their tiny, obscure beginnings. With Jesus it was small things with individuals that had the most leverage. That we are reading and telling this story two thousand years later is a prime example. We don’t even know her name. Apparently it was forgotten early on as she became a symbol for all- then and now- who share her disability.⁵

The work of exposing evil was part of Jesus’ total ministry, but only a part. Now because of our modern intellectual prejudices against the supernatural- which is a peculiarly Western phenomena- it’s the part we most want to explain away as primitive or non-existent or only for far-away places like the mission field. Because if it’s true, there’s another layer of threat and danger in our world; not just terrorists networks recapturing Iraq and Afghanistan but hierarchies of hostile angels at work making everything worse all the time. We have an invisible enemy who’s smarter than we are, doesn’t play fair, and whose been at his job for quite a while with loads of helpers, ones not subject to our technologies and psychologies. And thus we truly need a Savior from outside, a powerful divine rescuer, not just a moral example or good teacher or noble hero but a loving Warrior, one who can give the devil a black eye, strip him of his power in the cross and resurrection, and finally guarantee his destruction in the lake of fire.⁶ We need one who can expose him, embarrass him, expel him, wound him fatally, and finally *do him in*. Francis McNutt summarizes:

⁴ Paraphrased from Joel Green, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 521.

⁵ For an article on this issue, see Mary Ann McColl, et. al, “Jesus and People with Disabilities: Old Studies, New Approaches,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* (Online), 63, No. 3-4, Fall-Winter 2009, 1-11 with page 6 on today’s story.

⁶ Rev. 20:9-10.

“Again, Christian tradition says that the evil that weighs down the human race is a force so powerful that our own unaided humanity cannot successfully overcome it.... It is precisely because the evil in the world has a satanic origin that we cannot simply overcome it by better Christian education or church programs; we need a Savior. Without a Savior our world is lost.”⁷

Now since our doctrinal statements in the *Book of Discipline* mention the devil,⁸ and since our hymnal (our sung theology) is full of references⁹, and since the Sermons and Notes of John Wesley include the issue¹⁰, and since our baptismal vows begin with a renunciation of spiritual evil,¹¹ it’s logical to claim that belief in a personal focus of evil is part of historic Christian and Methodist belief, no matter how

⁷ *Deliverance From Evil Spirits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2009), 32.

⁸ *The Confession of Faith*, Article XI: “Sanctification and Christian Perfection” reads in the final paragraph, “He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; the world, the flesh, and the devil (ital. ad.) are put under his feet” (*BOD 2012*, 73).

⁹ For a sample, see *The U.M. Hymnal*, No. 26, “Lord of the Dance,” No. 263, “When Jesus the Healer Passed Through Galilee,” No. 264, “Silence Frenzied, Unclean Spirit,” No. 269, “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days,” No. 513, “Soldiers Of Christ Arise,” as well as the obvious No. 110, “A Mighty Fortress.”

¹⁰ See the Indices under “Satan” and “Devil” in Volume II of W.P. Harrison, ed., *The Wesleyan Standards: Sermons by the Rev. John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: B.F. Haynes Pub. Co., 1886). For John Wesley’s teaching on Satan, see Thomas Oden, *John Wesley’s Teaching, Volume I: God And Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 144-146, 176, 189-190; also Wesley’s sermon No. 72 “Of Evil Angels” on Eph. 6:12 (www.godonthenet.com/wesley/sermons). For a video see Fred Sanders, “John Wesley: On The Origins Of Evil,” <http://open.biola.edu/resources/john-wesley-the-origin-of-evil>.

¹¹ “The Baptismal Covenant I,” *The U.M. Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 34. When questioned in a phone conversation as to why the baptismal renunciations did not include an explicit mention of Satan (as do the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian and Lutheran liturgies in line with patristic practice), Dr. Larry Stookey, the primary author for the baptismal services, told me that the language of “spiritual forces of wickedness” was sufficiently ambiguous so that both liberals and conservatives could both use the liturgy and read into it their own preferences!

much it's been explained away by those who are more impressed with intellectual fads than by biblical and officially established church teaching.

And at the end of a life which was divine revelation from start to finish and beyond, Jesus routed the most fearsome enemy of all, death, not by avoiding it but by embracing in on the cross and then mocking its short victory in resurrection.¹² We live in a visible material world and in an invisible spiritual world which overlap and interlock, and we must learn to be skilled in interacting with both at the same time. In Jesus, the one who taught us to pray "but deliver us from evil," we have a defender from the Evil One. Outside of Jesus and his church you are free game, like a lamb in wolf country with no shepherd. Any wonder so many lives are shredded and so many go through the same misery generation after generation and that the very best of medicine and psychotherapy seem powerless in so many cases? There's another problem of a different kind! And only the church is able to deal with it. It is to us that Christ has given his name and his authority and his Spirit and his Book and two thousand years of case studies so we may know what to do. Not the hospitals, not the government or courts, not the school system or the universities, but the church! We've neglected our unique responsibilities too long. We've denied the issue intellectually, wimped out pastorally, hidden in stained glass ghettos and moaned in pious tones, "Ain't the world a terrible place! Now let's talk about something important, "Whose turn is it to supply the flowers next Sunday?" Hello?

To move us from these opening reflections to the text I want to use a quote from the ever-irreverent Mark Twain:

"We may not pay (Satan) reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has, for untold centuries, maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order."¹³

I do not believe Jesus went looking for evil, or that it constantly filled his

¹² For a defense of Jesus' embodied resurrection and transformed physicality, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), Chapter 3, "Can A Scientist Believe In The Resurrection?" 41-63.

¹³ "Give Satan Credit," PreachingToday.com, from *Leadership*, Vol. 12, No. 3.

consciousness.¹⁴ He was God-the-Father focused and told us to seek first the kingdom;¹⁵ he was Holy Spirit filled and full of the gifts and fruit; he was disciple-accompanied and people-oriented; he was the power of love walking around with skin on, but when he ran into the devil or one of his underlings, he knew what to do. It's inevitable: if you preach the kingdom of God, the other power base will raise resistance. Turn on the spiritual lights and watch spiritual vermin run for cover like rats and roaches. Speak the truth and wait for a lie to emerge as a counter. Love people and the one who hates all made in God's image will soon show his face. Go out on patrol in the rice paddies of Vietnam or the deep valleys of Afghanistan and wait for enemy fire. These are images that help us understand the spiritual dynamics of what happened when Jesus taught in the synagogue that sabbath. It was a truth encounter that led to a power encounter that lead to a painful division.

Luke is clear; the incident happened in worship. Five times Luke mentions it was *the sabbath*. It was a good thing for the ruler of the synagogue to invite Rabbi Jesus to read and teach. But once Jesus takes the pulpit, things get out of control. I've often wondered to myself if the reason for our preacher-led, highly-structured worship is not to give God too much wiggle room. I love our liturgy, but is there a dark side as well? We offer our respects, but from a safe distance. The Bible is read, the theology sound, sermons preached, sacraments celebrated, creeds recited, the music often stirring, but where is the surprising and disturbing presence of the Lord who regularly interrupted synagogue services with signs and wonders?

¹⁴ In *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, J.I. Packer wrote under "Demon Obsession":

"In recovering a sense of the supernaturalness of God, charismatics have grown vividly aware of the reality of supernatural personal evil, and there is not doubt that their development of 'deliverance' ministries and the impulse they have given to the renewal of exorcism have been salutary for man. But if all life is seen as a battle with demons in such a way that Satan and his hosts get blamed for bad health, bad thoughts, and bad behavior, with reference to physical, psychological, and relational factors in the situation, a very unhealthy demonic counterpart of super-supernaturalism is being developed. There is not doubt that this sometimes happens and that it is a major obstacle to moral and spiritual maturity when it does" (Quoted in a sermon by Ron Ritchie on Lk. 10:13-21, pbc.org/dp/riche/4257.html).

¹⁵ Matthew 6:33.

Luke 13:10-21 **11**

In the story before us a fight breaks out, at one level a skirmish between Jesus and a spirit of infirmity, at another between Jesus and the ruler of the synagogue (read *pastor*) who didn't like when Jesus what he did after he gave him the pulpit. He wanted religious order; Jesus wanted God's kingdom disorder. He wanted sabbath conformity; Jesus wanted sabbath compassion. He wanted to keep people in line; Jesus wanted to set a woman free. I have some sympathy for the guy. He was the leader of a local religious franchise and a good Jew who kept the rules. I know his anxiety. A woman was straightened out, and he was bent out of shape! What do you do *the week after* Jesus ruins your church? Do you try to put the broken pieces back together, or do you say, "Perhaps God has something new for us?" Five years later people are still talking, "Hey, Jacob, remember the sabbath Jesus came to church and put that stooped lady in the pipe bender. You could hear her back popping and cracking! Sounded awful. I sit beside her each week. Says she likes seeing the sky and looking folk in the eye.

The Outside Layer (a. v.10 // a' vv.18-21)

There's nothing more dangerous in the church than biblical teaching because it has potential, though not the guarantee, to create an appetite for God; the dark side is that it may fill us with knowledge and puff us up as Pharisees and little enforcers, and to this mentality pastors are particularly prone. Luke opens and closes our story with Jesus' teaching, a short report in verse 10 and two kingdom parables at the end in verses 18 through 21. There's enough raw material in the Bible and in the creeds and in orthodox theology and in the living experience of the church to keep us busy for years, and in this sense every church needs to be a mini-seminary of sorts. It's where Jesus nearly always started, not with miracles or healing but teaching, looking people eye-to-eye across a lectern or out of doors and speaking about the God who is revealed in the history of Israel and in his own ministry. There's no more fascinating subject than the nature and work of Almighty God, creator of all things visible and invisible. One of the first signs of renewal is hunger for Scripture; the Holy Spirit creates an appetite for truth. The grip of endless TV and entertainment is broken because something more substantial and fascinating is tugging at minds and hears.

My observation is that people change for three reasons: 1) when they learn enough- *the head route*; 2) when they're loved enough- *the heart route*, and 3) sadly, when they hurt enough- *the hard-head route*; and some- it seems- don't change at all. In our story we find all three. People were instructed from the pulpit; the bent woman was loved into a new posture, and the synagogue ruler was put in great pain and

public shame. Teaching starts in the pulpit, but it must spread beyond that if the church is not over-reliant on one source. It's where Jesus started, verse 10: "Now he was *teaching* in one of the synagogues on the sabbath." If I keep one appointment a week, it's this one. To show up prepared, then be willing to leave the results to whatever God wants to do with his Word.

And what was the focus of Jesus' teaching? One thing- the kingdom of God.¹⁶ The rule and reign of his Father that was even now breaking in upon the world to set things right, the primarily meaning of which is liberation from all that keeps life locked behind the triple doors of sin, ignorance, and evil. But what is this mysterious kingdom like? And to what can it be compared? Well, it can be compared to the daily experiences of men and of women. Interesting isn't it that Jesus used the experience of both sexes as windows into the kingdom? Not just the experience of men with mustard bushes but of women baking bread. A church that values the experiences of women and men is onto something that points to the kingdom.¹⁷ When Jesus talked about planting a mustard seed, men's ears perked up; when he turned to bread and leaven, women's ears perked up. When I use sports analogies and speak about tools and use military images, I see the men perk up. *Home Improvement! Tool Time!* When I speak about children and relationships, I see women perk up. *Oprah!* We need each other to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

So Jesus told two parables with one message: this kingdom thing 1) *starts small*- a mustard seed or a pinch of yeasty sourdough, 2) is *hidden away*- in the earth and in the larger lump, 3) but has enough *inherent power* to do big things- a bush large enough for a variety of birds or a hundred and fifty pounds of warm bread. So never despise the day of small beginnings, because if it is a *kingdom thing* which carries the energy of God, it will yield something all out of proportion to the humble origins. A Sunday School lesson to children, a morning prayer over a cup of coffee, a kind word to a stranger, a phone call, a special offering, an altar call, a sermon, a

¹⁶ See N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999), especially chapter 2, "The Challenge of the Kingdom," 34-53; Dallas Willard, *Living In Christ's Presence* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2014), Chap. 2, "Who Are The Experts At Life Transformation," 41-67.

¹⁷ See Ruth Haley Barton, *Equal To The Task: Men & Women In Partnership* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1998), especially Chapter 1, "Created for Life Together," 17-32, and Chapter 3, "The Discipline of Honoring Sexuality," 49-62.

song, a hope or a dream- all little things in themselves, but they are the stuff from which the kingdom of God invades this world and begins the work of transformation. It was only one woman with bent back and a minor spirit easily dismissed, a small thing when you consider all the people in that day with spinal deformities; small but not insignificant, because many healings have followed it, and one day God promises as the ultimate orthopedist to straighten out the bodily deformities of his precious sons and daughters in the resurrection, and we shall have new bodies like that of the risen Jesus. Every healing is a mustard seed and every deliverance a pinch of yeasty dough pointing beyond itself to the final healing and liberation of all creation. Biblical teaching is highly subversive. It plants little ideas that have explosive power and transformative consequences. Crack open your Bible with other seekers, and God will crack open your life. It looks so harmless, but it's where the revolution begins, "Now Jesus was *teaching* in one of the synagogues on the sabbath," and he asked a question, "What is the kingdom of God like?"

The Next Layer: Deliverance (b. vv.11-13 // b' vv.16-17).

But Jesus taught not only in words but in deeds, the one illumining the other. So if the teaching of God's Word does not eventually lead to lives changed by the living touch of God, then there's a fatal disconnect in the church. Bible knowledge without changed lives makes us Pharisees; changed lives without Bible knowledge make us know-nothing enthusiasts; Bible knowledge and changed lives together makes us mature, dangerous Christians. All Bible, we dry up. All Spirit, we blow up. Spirit and truth together, we grow up! So in the next inmost layer of the story we have a deed of power to display the teaching. We move from lecture to lab.

We don't know her name. Like so many chronic sufferers, she became her condition, *the-bent-over-woman*. Shorter than she used to be, the devil on her back weighing her down, a life bent out of shape for eighteen years. Long term suffering. And yet where do we find her on the sabbath? In the synagogue looking down at the floor because it's all she could see. Each sabbath her flickering flame of faith was kept alive by the readings and the prayers till one day Jesus showed up and she came forward and stood up straight under the power of his anointed word and empowered touch! As the black preachers say, "Jesus may be late, but he's always on time!" She's not the kind you see at Wal-Mart on Wednesday, but when asked is too tired to come to church on Sunday. She knew what she needed came only from above.

Her diagnosis had two parts, physical and spiritual. We're not used to such

combinations, but Jesus is. *A spirit of infirmity or weakness.* Since Jesus says she was bound by Satan, many commentators understand this to be a specific type of demonic presence Jesus discerned, a spirit that was related to her physical infirmity, which was a bent back, the technical name for which is *Spondylitus Ankylopoietica*.¹⁸ Others say *spirit of infirmity* is a euphemism for a worn down condition.¹⁹ That Jesus refers to her being bound by Satan in verse 16 means the Evil One is involved, whether as the immediate or more distant cause of her affliction. Whatever the precise relation, Jesus banished the spirit with a word from above, “Woman, you *are* loosed (i.e. *by God*) from your infirmity,” then straightened her back with the touch of both hands. He put her in God’s pipe-bender. Wouldn’t you like to see that on YouTube? Snap, crackle, pop, look you in the eye!

In such stories details are always important, as in verse 12, “And when Jesus *saw* her....” Earlier he had *viewed* her as a member of the congregation, but now he *saw* her, more importantly he *saw into her* through the Spirit’s gift of attention. He was directed to her and instructed to call her forward, which he did. She did not ask; she was summoned. She had faith to come to synagogue, and when she was singled out had faith to come forward. In her difficulty she was open, and it was a risk. Was she going to be made fun of again or accused that some sin caused her posture? No; all that’s about to end forever. Today gossip and speculation stop.

Jesus did not pray. He simply announced what God showed him, then laid his hands on her in a gesture of blessing of what God was already up to, “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity!” The spirit left. “And he laid his hands upon her....” She stood up straight. A word for her ears and a touch for her flesh. When they came together, the love the Father flowed through the hands of the Son by the power of the Spirit into the bent spine of a daughter of Abraham. Bones began to crunch and crackle; invisible bonds were loosed. In a minute she was back to full height. First he addressed her as *woman*, then with the ennobling title *a daughter of Abraham*, a woman of faith.

¹⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 212.

¹⁹ Dr. John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical And Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1998), Chapter 11, “The Case of the Bent Woman,” 131-141.

I love a story Dr. Fred Craddock tells. He met a man in a restaurant one day. “You a preacher?” the man asked.

Somewhat embarrassed, Fred said, “Yes.”

The man pulled up a chair to Fred’s table. “Preacher, let me tell you a story. Once there was a little boy who grew up sad. Life was tough because mama had me, but she’d never married. You know how a small Tennessee town treats people like me? The words they use to name kids that don’t have no father? Well, we never went to church; nobody asked us. For some reason or other, we went one night when they was having revival. They had a big, tall preacher visiting to do the revival, all dressed in black. He had a thunderous voice that shook the little church. We sat toward the back, Mama and me. Well, that preacher got to preaching, about what I don’t know, stalking up and down the aisle of that little church. It was somethin’.

After the service, we were slipping out the back door when I felt that big preacher’s hand on my shoulder. I was scared. He looked way down at me, looked me in the eye and says, “Boy, who’s your Daddy?”

“I don’t have no Daddy.” That’s what I told him in a trembling voice, “I ain’t got no Daddy.”

“O yes you do,” boomed the big preacher, “you’re a child of the Kingdom; you have been bought with a price; you are a child of the King!”

“I was never the same after that. Preacher, for God’s sake, preach that.”

The man pulled back his chair away from the table. He extended a hand and introduced himself to Preacher Fred. Craddock said the name rang a bell. He was the legendary former governor of the State of Tennessee.²⁰

First *a bent woman*, then simply *a woman*, finally *a daughter of Abraham*, her story of eighteen years of suffering and one grand moment of freedom preserved by Luke so we might never be surprised what happens in church when the risen Jesus is present. Satan has many chains and bonds in his closet of pain. Some he literally *bends over and crushes with the unrelieved burdens of life*, but many are *brought low* by drunkenness, by addictions, by bitterness, by perversions, greed, hatred and all manner of sins. He damages both emotionally and physically, visibly and invisibly, outwardly and inwardly. Some he ties in emotional knots. And only Jesus, who cares not just about multitudes but about individuals, can set them free and bless them with restored dignity and a new chance at life. I know, because he did it for me, and July 5 will be the forty-second anniversary of my being straightened out!

²⁰ Quoted in a sermon by Dr. William Willimon on Luke 13:10-21, www.chapel.duke.edu/sermons/082398.html.

The Core: Pain For The Synagogue Ruler (c.vv.14 // c' v.15).

People may change when they *learn enough*, thus Jesus the teacher and teller of parables. People may change when they're *loved enough*; that's Jesus the straightener of the crooked. People may change when they *hurt enough*. At the center we find a religious man wishing he'd had never invited the man from Nazareth to the pulpit. Jesus messed up his synagogue. Note that he did not speak *to Jesus* but *about Jesus* to the people in a way that cast the Lord as a sabbath-breaker, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath." He didn't deny the healing; he was just angry it messed with his policy of keeping sabbath. If he admitted it he'd have to change his fundamental paradigm of who God was, a God more concerned with compassion than legal regulations.

But Jesus was assertive and did not speak *about* him but *to him*, "You care for an animal; why can't God care for a woman who belongs to him? You untie it to get a drink; why can't God untie her to get a life? The devil bound her eighteen years of sabbaths; so why can't she be freed today?" The synagogue ruler and his friends went from anger to shame as the people rejoiced; we have no report he changed. Jesus is not in the business of protecting religious leaders from humiliation, me included. When pastors or laity think our job is to *manage God* and keep everything in order, we become the enemies of the gospel of freedom in Jesus we've been assigned to spread. Woe be to the pastor who gets angry when Jesus starts messin' with his church! I don't want to be that man. Pastor John Wimber once shared how the Lord spoke to him directly, "John," he said, "take your hands off my bride."

CONCLUSION

Odd, isn't it? Jesus had more trouble healing a religious leader of bad theology than straightening out a woman bent double by Satan for eighteen years. He banished a presence and put a crooked body in God's pipe-bender, but what do you do with a hard heart? Is it possible to be so invested in the stuff of religion we miss God? Her problem was visible, his invisible till Jesus exposed him. That sabbath some were glad, some mad; some blessed, others bothered; some testifying, other gossiping.

A sermon is a warning about what God may do in church. What might he want to do with us today?

APPENDIX 1

Explicit And Implicit Comparisons In Jesus Healing/Loosing The Bent Woman

Jesus And The Bent Woman	Synagogue Leader And The Bent Woman
Bent Woman, Daughter of Abraham, vv.11, 12, 16	Ox/Ass: Beasts Of Burden, v.15
Bound by Satan for eighteen years	Bound by rope/ stall for a few hours
Loosed/healed spiritually with physical consequences on the Sabbath	Loosed physically to be watered on the Sabbath (up to 3000 ft. travel)
Needs God's compassion for healing	Need human compassion for watering
ought not (<i>ouk dei</i>), v.16	ought (<i>dei</i>) (v.14)
Days for kingdom work and healing are unlimited, including the sabbath, an <i>all-week</i> God	Days for healing are limited in non-critical cases, necessary to work six days only
Jesus speaks for God with power to heal	Synagogue leader speaks for current Sabbath practice
Jesus shames the synagogue leaders	Synagogue leader tries to shame Jesus
Accuses them as <i>hypocrites</i>	Accuses him of sabbath breaking = false prophet
Issue = <i>who</i> rules	Issue = the rules

Concentric Structure Of Luke 13:10-21

S1 a. v.10 Jesus Teaches In The Synagogue On The Sabbath Before The Healing

b. vv.11-13 Healing Of The Bent Woman/ Spirit Of Infirmity/ Eighteen Years

1. v.11 Appearance And Dual Description: 1) Spirit, 2) Bent
2. vv.12-13a Cure And Dual Description: 1') Freed by God, 2') Made Straight
3. v.13b Praised God

S2 c. v.14 Sabbath Controversy: Observance Has Priority

Q1, S3
S4

c' v.15 Sabbath Response: Compassion Has Priority (Minor to Major)

b' vv.16-17 Commentary On The Healing Of The Woman/ Satan/Eighteen Years

Q2, S5

- 1. v.16 Question 2 As An Answer To Question 1
- 2a. v.17a Response 1: *All* Jesus' Adversaries Are Shamed
- 2b. v.17b Response 2: All the people rejoiced at all the glorious things done by him.

a' vv.18-21 Jesus Teaches The Kingdom Of God To People After The Healing

Q3, 4

- 1. vv.18-19 Double Question + Parable: A Man Who Sowed A Mustard Bush

Q5

- 2. vv.20-21 Question + Parable: A Woman Who Leavened A Large Amount Of Dough

APPENDIX 2

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEALING SERVICES AND PRAYERS

(Taken from *The United Methodist Book of Worship [1989], 613-615*)

Scripture strongly affirms ministries of spiritual healing, which in recent years have received renewed emphasis throughout Christ's holy Church. The root of the word healing in New Testament Greek, *sozo*, is the same as that of salvation and wholeness. Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through such healing, God works to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, among individuals and communities, within each person, and between humanity and the rest of creation. The New Testament records that Jesus himself healed the estranged and sick and sent out his disciples on ministries of healing. James (5:14-16a) calls us also to pray for and anoint the sick, that they may be healed.

All healing is of God. The Church's healing ministry in no way detracts from the gifts God gives through medicine and psychotherapy. It is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of one's health. Rather, it adds to our total resources for wholeness. Healing is not magic, but underlying it is the great mystery of God's love. Those who minister spiritual healing are channels of God's love. Although no one can predict what will happen in a given instance, many marvelous healings have taken place.

God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering but does promise to be with us in our suffering. Trusting that promise, we are enabled to recognize God's sustaining presence in pain, sickness, injury, and estrangement. Likewise, God does not promise that we will be cured of all illnesses; and we all must face the inevitability of death. A Service of Healing is not necessarily a service of curing, but it provides an atmosphere in which healing can happen. The greatest healing of all is the reunion or reconciliation of a human being with God. When this happens, physical healing sometimes occurs, mental and emotional balance is often restored, spiritual health is enhanced, and relationships are healed. For the Christian the basic purpose of spiritual healing is to renew and strengthen one's relationship with the living Christ.

Patterns of healing services grow out of both Church traditions and the needs of the moment. Prayers for healing, accompanied if desired by anointing with the laying on of hands, may be incorporated into any service of congregational worship as a Response to the Word. Also, there may be a healing service at a stated time each week or month, or healing may be ministered privately to individuals. Many find not only prayer but also Holy

Luke 13:10-21 19

Communion, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil to be healing.

Laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and the less formal gesture of holding someone's hand all show the power of touch, which plays a central role in the healings recorded in the New Testament. Jesus often touched others--blessing children, washing feet, healing injuries or disease, and raising people from death. Biblical precedent combines with our natural desire to reach out to persons in need in prompting us to touch gently and lovingly those who ask for healing prayers. Such an act is a tangible expression of the presence of the healing Christ, working in and through those who minister in his name.

Anointing the forehead with oil is a sign act invoking the healing love of God. The oil points beyond itself and those doing the anointing to the action of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the healing Christ, who is God's Anointed One. Olive oil is traditionally used in anointing but can become rancid. Sweet oil, which is olive oil with a preservative, is available in any pharmacy. Fragrant oils may be used, but care must be taken because some people are allergic to perfumes.... It is important that those ministering in services of healing be sensitive to the differences that exist among those who come for healing ministries. Sound preaching, teaching, and pastoral care are essential for healing ministries to accomplish their purpose.

