

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas**  
**24 August 2025**

**Luke 13:10-17**

The passage for today starts, "Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath." We know that in Jewish tradition, no work can be done during the Sabbath day. This is a holy day of rest and work stops for everyone. Preaching, however, is not unusual or problematic. Many itinerant rabbis preach on the Sabbath day at local synagogues without opposition. In fact, in the gospel of Luke we see Jesus teaching in the synagogue a number of times during the Sabbath. The problem arises with what happens next. The passage continues, "And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years... When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." Healing during the Sabbath is considered a "work" and therefore not allowed. Jesus, however, is pointing to something deeper through his actions. In fact, of the six times Jesus preaches in a Synagogue on the Sabbath in the Gospel of Luke (4:16-30, 4:31-37, 6:1-5, 6:6-11, 13:10-17, and 14:1-6), four of these events include a healing: A man with an unclean spirit (4:31-37), a man with a withered hand (6:6-11), a crippled woman (13:10-17), and a man with dropsy (14:1-6).

The leader of the synagogue is furious. He says, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." As the leader of the place, he sees himself as the enforcer of Levitical Law. No works ought to be done. Plain and simple. The synagogue has rules, like every other institution has rules. Chick-fil-A, for example doesn't open on Sundays. Imagine if a renegade cook decides to open and start cooking without corporate's permission. They would have the right to oppose and even fire him. There are dry counties where no alcohol is sold on Sundays. If anyone decides to open a store and sell liquor on Sundays they would be shut down and perhaps even incarcerated. As much as Jesus has a problem with the man's criticism, his concern is deeper. His real concern is with the law itself, which in many cases allows for the proper care of animals while denying the same care to humans. We see this criticism of the Law in various ways: First, the healing of the woman didn't have to happen on the Sabbath, he could have done it after sundown or early in the morning the next day. Second, why make such a public display of the healing? This could have been done privately in a less obvious and confrontational way. Once again, Jesus wants to shock people out of their comfort zone to make a powerful statement about the Torah.

Jesus 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... be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" In another place, he asks, "Is it proper to save a life on the Sabbath day? If an animal falls in a gutter and is about to die, can you save it?" Of course, the answer to these questions is "Yes". The law allows for certain works, especially in cases of emergency. Some may disagree the case of this woman is an emergency, but to Jesus, her suffering required immediate help. This suffering was both physical as well as emotional. She lived in a world where empathy was in short supply. She was a deformed woman and to the Temple authorities of the day she was no more than a nuisance. She was unseen. She had no face and no voice.

The point Jesus is trying to make is simple, yet profound. People are more important than the Torah, the Law of Moses. The Law was created for the people and not the other way around. Jesus understood this well. The Law created people on the margins, unseen, unheard, completely disenfranchised. There are only two types of people for the Law: the righteous and the unrighteous. Unfortunately for this woman, and for all the people Jesus cured on the Sabbath, people with severe illnesses like hers are considered cursed by God and uncleansed. They are truly unseen and unheard, which makes Jesus' behaviors the more remarkable.

The passage tells us that Jesus "saw her", then after this, "he called her to him", and then he cured her. This sequence of events is important. Jesus saw the one others tried hard to ignore. He sees the unseen and acknowledges her as a "daughter of Abraham" or a Judean who belongs to the family of God. The Law which meant to separate the Jewish people from the nations, has in fact become an instrument of separation among the Judeans, creating an entire class of unseen and unheard people. He treats her as a "daughter" and as one who belongs. Second, he calls her and speaks to her. This is a controversial action because Rabbis are very cautious not to speak to women, especially if they are not accompanied by a male relative. In some cases this is seen as inappropriate. Jesus often subverts local custom and freely speaks to women in public. He is the true shepherd who came to earth to find the lost, and this includes people of all ages and genders.

Finally, Jesus heals her of her pain, her shame, her sense of isolation, and her illness. One who was crippled now has the health and power to stand up straight. We are told that Jesus' "opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing." Of course, we who know the rest of the story know that the opposition will ultimately arrest and kill Jesus, and the adoring crowds would soon shout "crucify him!" There is a price to pay

when you choose to see what the rest of the world refuses to see, to hear what many are trying hard to ignore, to love those others see as unworthy of our love.

Jesus has been preaching about the kingdom of God for several chapters in Luke. One of the great features of the kingdom is the equality of status among men and women. In the kingdom, all distinctions based on gender, family name, socioeconomic class, ability, or status before the law, disappear forever. In the kingdom people are loved and cared for because they are children of God. It is a kingdom of acceptance, peace, and mutual love. This woman belongs to the kingdom of God and Jesus treats her as a member of the kingdom.

My friends, we too have people in our own towns that are unseen, unheard, and treated with great apathy. We too have our marks of distinction, and we know well who belongs and who doesn't belong. Today, Jesus invites us to see, to befriend, and to act on behalf of those without a voice. Today he invites us to continue to build his kingdom in our midst and to see all people we encounter as belated children of God.

I pray that we may be able to hear his invitation. Amen!