

The 3 Rs: Released
Luke 8:1-3
Sunday, August 9, 2026

Back in July I went on a backpacking trip. Unfortunately, the first day was pretty tough. Almost straight uphill, 6000 feet of elevation gain in 10 miles. But I sucked it up and went after it, powering my way up and up and up. And it felt pretty good. Not so much the next morning, though. My chest felt heavy and I was having a tough time getting enough breath. I powered through the next day, figuring that everything would resolve itself, but it didn't. The heaviness and the difficulty breathing just got worse. I started coughing and got more and more exhausted. As much as I wanted to ignore the coughing and the breathing and the exhaustion and just keep on going, I couldn't. Something was wrong. As it turns out, I had what's known as High Altitude Pulmonary Edema, basically altitude induced pneumonia. I was sick.

Which reminds me of what we talked about last week: repentance. We talked about how repentance is the first step in salvation and how the first step in repentance is recognizing you're lost (or, in my case, sick).

And the next step in repentance is to commit to change; to do something about it. In my situation, the only option was to get to a lower altitude. And so, that's what I did.

And the result? Well, the relief was almost immediate. I could breathe easier, the cough started to lessen, and the heaviness in my chest became far less painful. I was well on the way to being fully healed.

Which brings us to the scripture we just heard. Because I think something similar happened with these women followers of Jesus.

Now, today's scripture starts out much like the one from last Sunday. Jesus is traveling around Galilee, preaching and proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom. Now, as we talked about last week, almost all of the Jews of Jesus' day expected this kingdom of God Jesus was talking about would be a typical human kingdom: the Jews would kick the Romans out of the middle east and take over for themselves.

But as we read Luke's Gospel, we pretty quickly come to the realization that that's not the kind of kingdom Jesus is talking about. Right before this scripture, Jesus *heals* the slave of a Roman Centurion, he raises a widow's son from the dead, he forgives a sinful woman who's washing his feet with her tears and her hair, telling her that her faith has *saved* her. And then, right after the scripture we just read, Jesus *heals* a man who had been possessed by a legion of demons, *heals* a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (incidentally, telling her that her faith had *saved* her), and raises a 12-year-old girl from the dead.

And it's in all this healing and saving and raising that we see the kind of kingdom Jesus is actually talking about. At least according to Jesus, God's kingdom isn't a political entity. It's a realm where people are made whole and given new life.

Now, some of you might be thinking, "yeah, sure, Jesus physically healed and raised some people. But what does that have to do with the kind of "salvation" we talk about here in the church?"

And the answer is, “everything.” Because throughout his Gospel, Luke uses the same word for physical and spiritual healing. It’s the Greek word “sozo,” which is far broader than just physical healing. It’s a sort of comprehensive, all-inclusive word meaning rescue, preservation, and total restoration affecting the whole person—spirit, soul, and body. When Luke says Jesus healed someone, it’s almost always that word, sozo. When Jesus says, “your faith has saved you,” it’s that same word: sozo. Healing, salvation.

And, although Luke uses a different word in today’s scripture, it’s the exact same idea. It’s what happened with Mary Magdalene, and Joanna and those other women who traveled around with Jesus. They encountered Jesus and they were healed of their demons; they were released from the power of sin and death; their lives were fundamentally changed; they became followers of and believers in Jesus. As we say in the church, they were saved.

And saved ... salvation ... those are words we use a lot in the church, aren’t they? But when we hear them, what exactly do we mean?

Well, the starting point for answering that question is pretty much the same place I start whenever I’m interpreting scripture. It’s the fact that we were created in the image of a God who *is* love. The reason for your existence and mine is to live in that divine love; to share that love with God and with one another.

But, as we all know, something went terribly, terribly wrong. That’s not how most of us are living. Just as I was on my backpacking trip last month, we are spiritually sick.

And so, at its most basic level, salvation is the healing of that sickness. It’s getting us back into the relationship of divine love we were created for.

But here's the thing. That isn't something we can do on our own. We can recognize our sickness and we can trust God to heal us, but it's *God* who does the actual healing.

And that's where Grace comes in. Back at the beginning of the summer, we had a sermon series on God's grace. In that series I used a wonderful metaphor coined by John Wesley to explain how God's grace works. God's grace is like a house. God's grace gets us up on the porch, ready to enter the house. And the repentance we talked about last week—the recognition of our sickness and need for healing—is the key that unlocks the door.

But the door's still got to be opened, which is something we can't do on our own. God's got to open it from the inside. That's God's justifying grace, the grace of God welcoming us into the house, into the kind of life He created us to live, in His divine love.

And when we accept the invitation—when we step through the door—we are saved. We are healed, just as the women in today's scripture were healed, just as my lungs started to heal when I got down to a lower altitude. Our lostness, our sickness, our alienation from God is ended. We are made right with God. We are freed from the consequences of sin. We are ushered into new and eternal life.

But, as I explained when we were talking about the house, just stepping through the door isn't the end of our journey. In fact, it's just the beginning. There's still an endless eternity of love—room after room after room—to explore.

Here's how John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, thought about it. He viewed stepping through the door, or justification, as a fundamental change in status. It's instantaneous and immediate. Kind of like flipping a light switch. We go from dark to light; from fallen to

saved; from broken to healed. We have a new identity as people who have chosen to live as beloved children of God.

It's a change of status. Like when I got my driver's license. I went from being a non-driver to a driver. When we step through that door, we step into an entirely new kind of life; a life lived as beloved children of God.

But if we stop there, as a lot of Christians tend to do, we're missing out on the second half of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Because a fundamental aspect of the change we experience when we are saved, in fact, the thing that makes it all work, is that we receive God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit enters into us and becomes a part of us.

And that Spirit wants to work in us and with us to complete the healing process. As anyone who's been sick knows, it's pretty rare to get better all at once. It takes time. While my lung situation improved substantially from just coming down the mountain a little, it was several weeks before I felt healed enough to even go for a walk around the block.

And we see something similar with the women in today's scripture as we read through to the end of Luke's Gospel and into the book of Acts. Even though Jesus cured them of their demons, they still had a long way to go to fully live into the new life Jesus had given them; to really understand who he was and what he had actually done for them. Their healing was just the beginning of the process. They still had a lot of growing to do.

And it's the same with us. Justification—that initial moment of salvation—it isn't the end of our journey with Christ, it's just the beginning. We've still got a lot of growing to do. And that's what we'll be talking about the next couple of weeks.