

Title: Let The People Rejoice – FPC Franklin

Text: Luke 13:10-17

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As school starts up each year and my kids were younger, I would tell stories of my growing up years and something particular that happens today that is much different from when I was in school. In my day, we would purchase the normal school supplies and that first day of school we would receive a number for our locker, and we would search the hallways for where we would often return multiple times every day for nine months. I even purchased a lock with a combination that I still remember today.

Today's experience is quite different. One of the most important and expensive school purchases is a new backpack. As I see the school kids walking home or coming off the bus, I note that many of our kids schlep between school and home on their back their books, iPad, and other necessary school items, and I am now aware that some schools no longer provide even a locker for our kids to use. These backpacks each year become heavier and heavier each year.

In fact, there is real concern among medical professionals about the long-term effects of this "weightiness" on long-term effect on the nerves, bones and muscles of young children. There are longitudinal studies underway to follow the muscular-skeletal effects that may result from years of hauling around pounds school gear and all the other portable "necessities" our kids carry on their back ten months out of the year.

As we come into the presence of today's text, being bent over by the burdens of life is the focus of this week's message. As I / we age, I am ever aware of how gravity shrinks and bows our frames. But notice that the malady that affects the woman in this week's text is not just physical. No, her bending frame is diagnosed as coming from "a spirit," not a physical ailment. That is the background for this text.

Luke 13:10-17 Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman

Now (Jesus) 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 to 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 being done by him.

Let us go ahead and admit that our backs are important. A couple of weeks ago, I was affected when Laura “threw her back out.” And her back trouble began not from some huge weight lifted, and I think most of us who struggle with back issues know what I mean. We do so much with our twisting and turning, and everything is fine. And then the unexpected and agonizing happens. We reach over to pick up a package, bend down to tie our shoe, turn to reach for the soap in the shower, or put out our arms to scoop an “arms-up” child and suddenly, something goes terribly wrong. A wrench. A tweak. A tear. A back muscle, or disk, or nerve... something tweaks, and we go completely “off-line” and from that moment our movements become misery until the problem is resolved.

In this week’s gospel text Jesus deals head-on with a debilitating back issue. The woman Jesus sees in the synagogue, the woman he calls forward without her ever seeking him out, is “bent over and quite unable to stand up straight.” Luke’s text does not tell us anything else about this woman. We do not know if she was rich or poor, a paragon or a pariah, someone who was honored or ostracized. All we know is that she was perceived as one who had endured “a spirit” that had crippled her, bent her in half, for the past eighteen years. We also know that despite that affliction, she still attended worship in the synagogue during the weekly Sabbath ceremonies. That is all we know about her, but we do know that Jesus sees this deeply troubled and pain-filled woman.

When he sees her, Jesus goes into action. He calls her over and he heals her. Not because of any expressions of faith on her part. As a matter of record, her only response is she walks over to him, he tells her she is “set free,” and he places his hands upon her. This Jesus moment causes her to change. Notice she does respond to her healing by “praising God.” Our focus is on Jesus in this part of the text. Jesus’ response to this woman’s “bent over” condition is a spontaneous moment of overwhelming compassion. Something about this woman and her brokenness struck Jesus so strongly that he reacted immediately to bring a new sense of wholeness to the one who was bent over, flying at “half-staff” for eighteen years.

In this body image and aging culture, we spend enormous amounts of money and time on taking calcium supplements, lifting weights and intense workouts, or even bone-strengthening injections to fight off the bone loss we get as we age. But gravity and time always wins. We shrink. We bend. We break. We shrivel. It is a part of the human condition. Those are the physical things that goes with growing older.

Yet this text points to us another thing that bends our bodies. There is another inevitable part of our condition that bends us down and bows us over: the weight of life. The weight of failure. The weight of the “what if” and “why did I?” The weight of loss of a loved one or friend and longing for their presence. The weight of past mistakes and sins. The weight of all that we have messed up and all that we have missed. It is a weight that brings us down and brings us low. All these things are matters of the spirit. These become our spiritual backpacks that we carry, and they can easily twist and deform us just as much, if not more, than our skeletal structure succumbs to gravity. Our spirits are dragged down as we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders.

This text points us to Jesus who is asking us right now “What is weighing you down today?” Is it physical pain? Is it financial debt? Is it the deep encounter of depression? Is it a chronic disease like slipped disk in the back or a knee that needs to be replaced that makes every day both a painful burden? Is it a family we know in crisis? Is it a family member far away? Is school demands? Is it worrying over our children’s welfare? All these items and more we load into our

backpacks and carry them around with us. At certain times in our lives, life bends us all. Friends, Jesus sees you. Jesus SEES YOU!

Notice Jesus delivered the woman who was bent by the weight of life. Jesus did not define her in terms of her spiritual weights. Absolutely not! Jesus did not define her in terms of her illness. Absolutely not! Jesus refused to define her in terms of her weakness and bentness. Absolutely not! Notice Jesus referred to her by her true identity: “a daughter” and not just any daughter. He called her a “daughter of Abraham.” Her identity came through her belonging to an old, old story. That story gave her identity and from her identity her years’ long bowed back was straightened.

Friends, Jesus sees us and the backpacks we are carrying.

- If we have diabetes? We are not a diabetic. We are a child of God with diabetes.
- If we suffer from depression. We are not depressed. We are a God’s with depression.
- If we have osteoporosis? We are not an osteoporotic. We are God’s child with osteoporosis.

Yes, our weights and burdens, our diseases and disorders are real, but they need not define us. God defines us as a daughter of Abraham and a son of Sarah. We belong to God!

Yet, I want us to notice something curious about this passage. In this dramatic healing, not everyone was happy. This healing does not sit well with everyone. Recall Jesus was a “guest preacher” at this synagogue.

And if I were Jesus, I would feel quite awkward and polite worrying about how my actions might offend the host. The host in Jesus’ case was the “leader of the synagogue,” and notice he took extreme exception to both Jesus’ actions and to his authoritative stance. Not only does this local religious leader cite Torah law to disparage Jesus’ actions, he also does not confront Jesus face-to-face with his accusation of legal infraction. Instead of coming to Jesus and making this a scholarly debate, the synagogue leader directly addresses “the crowd” because he wants to whip up an anti-Jesus sentiment within his synagogue.

The synagogue leader cited the legalities of Sabbath practices spelled out briefly in Deuteronomy (5:13) and Exodus (20:9). But just like Jesus’ Wilderness three-fold temptations, Jesus responds with scripture in Deuteronomy (22:1-4). Sabbath exceptions for creatures were remarkably compassionate. Remember animals were great investments, and remember animals were also routinely sacrificed for religious ceremonies. Hence it is still surprising to find all of the “take care” exceptions for animal care woven throughout Torah law. Although “work” was excluded on the Sabbath, activities that provided for the welfare of creatures were “special circumstances.” A tethered animal could be untied (technically a “work”) and walked to water and back again to its enclosure. An animal in distress — fallen into a ditch is the biblical example, but extrapolations are many was to be rescued, taken care of, healed.

It is these Jesus compassionate and conflictual moments, (the Greek word is σπλαγχνίζομαι “splagchinizomai” and relates to having our bowels yearn or feel sympathy toward or to pity. It is to love with our guts.) where Jesus declares to his host that despite his education and training, he is ignorant of the Law. Jesus’ logic is an example of the classic Jewish “less to more” argument: if you would rescue an ox or donkey on the Sabbath “how much more” would you rescue “a daughter of Abraham.”

Jesus' argument is further strengthened because the plight of this "daughter" was not caused by any accidental tumble into a pit but was the direct result of demoniac actions. She had been "bound by Satan for eighteen long years."

Like the write of Luke and us, our synagogue crowd opts for miracle over matters of the Law. Jesus' argument convinces those in attendance both of his authority and of the legitimacy and legality of his actions. They rejoice over the healing, the "wonderful things" he had accomplished, and those who opposed Jesus' works and words were "put to shame."

Which is our takeaway for today's text. When the living Lord touched our woman, he identified her as a "daughter of Abraham." And in that glorious identity as a child of God, she was re-charged and re-born.

Friends, if you or someone you know or meet is bent over with a heavy spiritual backpack, our text reminds us that Jesus sees us and names us a child of God. God reaching out through us and straightening out the bent and broken parts of our existence and the bent and broken part of others. God is reaching out through Room at the Inn, GraceWorks, Williams County Homeless Alliance, Breast Cancer Recovery in Action, and in so many ways.

Yes, we are all locked up, and some of us are seized up. But in treating each other as Jesus treats this woman, as a child of Abraham and Sarah (as a child of God) that is how we are released, and how we release others from what bends the back. Will we love a person to life this week? Will we let Jesus love YOU to life this week? Friends, let the people rejoice that in Jesus we are set free!