

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Psalm 103:1-8

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

08/25/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

10Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11And 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. 12When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14But 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." 15But 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? 16And 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?" 17When 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.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Healing

Good morning! The details are a little hazy, but I'm pretty sure it was a spring afternoon. I remember this because I was in that happy and excited mood you get when spring arrives after winter and the sun shines bright wherever you look. I had just finished an afternoon of classes, because I learned very quickly that morning classes in college were for the criminally insane, and I had just gotten home from Wheeling Jesuit University, about a 10-15 minute drive away, and sat down to relax for the rest of the day. And then my phone rang... My brother was 45 minutes away in college, my dad was out of town, and my sister needed to leave the family business for some minor crisis or another and so they needed me to shoot down to the shop to answer the phone for the few more hours Crummitt & Son was open. I unhappily got back into my car and began the short drive. As I turned onto Ohio State Route 7, a perfectly straight stretch of road that was about 2-3 miles before getting off by the shop, I figured that I needed to hustle, and that there was no reason to let this get me down! With that thought in mind I sank my right foot into the go fast pedal and shot up to 71 mph, in the 50 mph zone, before seeing the cop sitting off the side of the road.

I knew they were coming for me, it wasn't even a question. So I pulled over immediately and waited for my fate. "Where are you going in such a hurry?," the officer asked. "Down to my family business," I said. It was then that I realized in the grand scheme of things, what was my minor crisis in the midst of the rest of the world? How

many other cars drove by on important missions too? Did you know that if you took the entirety of time the universe has existed and made it equivalent to one mile the amount of time that human beings have existed would only take up the last three inches of that mile? Where would my rush to the family business fall on that scale? I doubt you could even see it! And yet for me it certainly seemed like an important event.

It made me wonder what was one woman's pain in today's Gospel story compared to the suffering of the rest of the world? What was one more day compared to 18 years of pain to Jesus? Probably nothing... to the woman with the bent back, probably everything.

We pick up today's text from the Gospel of Luke with Jesus teaching in the synagogue, the same place where he began his ministry in chapter 4. Dr. Ira Brent Driggers, my Gospels professor, writes that "*...when the Lukan Jesus first announced his mission... he described it in terms of human liberation and flourishing... There is hardly an episode in Luke that does not point back to this messianic manifesto.*"¹ That ministry was to bring good news to the poor, to set the captive free, to give sight to the blind, and to set anyone oppressed free. How's that for a mission statement? If Jesus was a normal person I would say he had bitten off a little more than he could chew. But nothing is impossible for God.

It's this mission that puts Jesus in conflict with the leaders of the synagogue, who argue that Jesus has failed to obey the third commandment of not working on the sabbath. "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy," we read. In the first century there was an argument about how to obey the commandment. Some argued for a strict,

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4144

face value observance of the law. Others argued that the spirit of the law allowed the rule to be bent, or at least understood differently. Dr. Driggers again helps, writing: *“Jesus draws directly from Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the version of the commandment that connects Sabbath rest to Israel’s liberation from slavery in Egypt. In Jesus’ view, since the Sabbath law commemorates and celebrates Israel’s liberation, it ought to be a day for enacting -- not inhibiting -- the present-day liberation of Israelites. Moreover, given the custom of providing water for thirsty livestock on the Sabbath (verse 15), it is surely appropriate to heal a long-suffering Israelite on the Sabbath (verse 16). In none of this does Jesus abolish the Sabbath commandment. Rather he aims to follow it faithfully. Jesus enters what was, at that time, an ongoing Jewish debate about how to interpret the Sabbath law, locating himself at the less stringent end of the opinion spectrum.”*²

Jesus does not wait to enact his liberation for this broken woman. 18 years of back pain... can you imagine? If there is anyone who could sympathize with her it’s me. I’ve been dealing with back problems for several years now, and while I can relate, I certainly can’t begin to understand her pain and suffering. One day might seem insignificant, but God’s liberation doesn’t wait for “a better day.”

If there is one thing the church is guilty of, it’s spending too much time talking about planning and trying to figure everything out before actually making any concrete moves or actions. The old joke is this, the congregational council needs to have a meeting to decide when they’ll have their next meeting. I get it, we want to make sure we

² Ibid

do things right and faithfully, but our words have often left us frozen and unable to act in the midst of God's call.

But, *“In this week’s reading, the motif of liberation reverberates with particular force. Jesus insists that the bent-over woman be ‘set free’ (apoluo, verse 12) and ‘released’ (luo, verse 16) from her ‘bond’ (desmos, verse 16).”*³ Jesus does not wait to speak to the woman, he doesn’t even talk to her before he acts. Jesus sees the woman and immediately restores her to fullness!

The Gospel reading reminds me of two important things: God calls us to action, the type of action that was announced in the beginning of his ministry in the Gospel of Luke, action that “brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and lets the oppressed go free.” At the same time I am reminded that there isn’t a metric for obtaining the most efficient means of “liberation.” Jesus doesn’t wait till he can heal an entire group of people with broken backs, he doesn’t worry about getting the most bang for his buck, he simply responds in love. A person’s pain is the center of their universe, no matter how small or insignificant it can seem to us. This is the ministry to which we are called to help, how will we respond? Amen.

³ Ibid