

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

08/21/2022

### **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 and Right Worship**

Good morning! Have you ever hurt your back? Well I certainly have, so let me tell you about it. I remember back in high school that if I were to stand around for anything over 15 minutes, my back would hurt. Nothing serious, but it was there. But, because I wrongly assumed I was normal, I just assumed everyone's back hurt after 15 minutes and I was just being a little baby about it. As I got older, the pain grew, until I woke up one morning after washing a car on internship and I couldn't turn my head. As I was driving to the church, I turned my head to switch lanes and heard an audible pop as something went very wrong. I barely made it, only to have my supervisor drive me right back home. A doctor's visit saw me do some therapy, but x-rays didn't show much. It wasn't until I was called here at St. Paul's that I was able to get to the bottom of things. Even then the doctors were skeptical, a 29 year old man shouldn't have major back problems. An MRI revealed two herniated discs. I had another MRI a few years later, and after therapy failed to work, we found out it was three herniated discs. By the end of another round of physical therapy I had a growing pain in the middle of my back that felt suspiciously like a fourth.

Now, I share this not because I need your sympathy, most of you know about my back already, but because what I have gone through pales in comparison to what the woman in our Gospel lesson has experienced. Where I have occasional bouts of trouble, this woman was fighting a daily struggle just to get up. Every single move would have been excruciating. It seems that she most likely had something called ankylosing spondylitis, and

the back pain was just a part of what she experienced. One scholar writes that symptoms would have included “*neck and back pain, fatigue, difficulty breathing, heart problems related to inflammation of the aorta, and, potentially, feelings of frustration, vulnerability, or isolation.*”<sup>1</sup> It’s certainly no walk in the park.

But here’s what’s so interesting about how Jesus responds. He doesn’t wait to intervene. For someone in that sort of pain, for that length of time, what’s one more day? Just a few weeks ago my steroid injection in my neck was postponed a week because of my cold. I wasn’t upset, I’ve had the pain this long, I could wait until the following week. But Jesus isn’t happy with that sort of solution. He wants this pain for the bent woman to be over NOW. How amazing is that? Our God isn’t satisfied in a world where any suffering is endured, especially a single day longer than it needs to be. And so Jesus heals her, immediately! The text reads “*13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*” I can’t imagine the sudden relief that would have washed over her.

His actions invite the ire of the local synagogue leader. It seems that while emergency medical intervention is allowed under the law, this situation seems to be a grey area. But Jesus turns it around, pointing out that tasks like “*leading from one domain to another*”<sup>2</sup> were forbidden, and yet everyone around him unties their donkey and leads them to water.

The core of the issue for Jesus is the same as the problem in our first reading from Isaiah, people are doing the right things for the wrong reasons. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is attacked by people who want to blindly follow a set of rules for misguided reasons, not to glorify God. The

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-3/commentary-on-luke-1310-17-5>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

difference between our texts is that while the issue is personal and intimate in our Gospel lesson, in Isaiah God is displeased with all of Israel. We only read Isaiah 58:9b-14, but the first 8 verses of the chapter tell us that, again, the people have been following all the rules, but for the wrong reasons. The people shout to God, saying *“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”* But God responds through the prophet, saying that they fast and humble themselves only to serve their own interests.

And it’s here that things get turned upside down. God responds with one of my favorite pieces of scripture; *“6Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? 8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 9Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.”*

“You’ve got it all wrong!” God says. “Fasting can take on different forms! Care for those that you have ignored!” God continues with our assigned text, going so far as to even say that their religious practices have only been to pursue their own interests.

All of this reveals one beautiful truth about God, and it’s captured perfectly by the scholar Brevard S. Childs. *“The God of Israel is not a static given, but a dynamic reality who must be actively engaged to be found.”* We see this same truth echoed in our Gospel text. Faith and worship of God isn’t about blind and rote action, but about something so much more! It’s

about opening our eyes to all of God's creation, loving and caring for all of it as we come together in love! Is it easy? Heck no! Since when did God ever promise us that things would be easy? It will challenge us, stretch us, and exhaust us. But when the dust settles, something beautiful will happen.

*“Then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup>The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup>Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” Amen.*