

Pastor Gail Duba  
Pentecost 11C

## **A Woman healed on the Sabbath**

August 21, 2022  
Luke 13:10-17

Today's scripture is about a woman who had been "disabled by a spirit" for eighteen years. She was bent over & couldn't stand up straight. Jesus straightened her up! He also straightened out the synagogue leader & the objectors. They were "put to shame."

The story reads like an interesting allegorical switch, in which a woman no doubt bent under a burden of shame heaped upon her by her synagogue and leaders for her ailment is healed, while the oppressors themselves (having become bent out of shape over Jesus' healing of her on the Sabbath) become shamed for their heartlessness. Luke renders an artful literary telling of the phenomenon, which all centers around the theme of "shame."

Who is the one bent out of shape? The woman or the leader of the synagogue? The woman is healed, for the shame was put upon her and was not her own. The leader however is crooked! He may have appeared to be on the straight and narrow due to his lofty position. But his true "bent" nature shows as his hypocrisy is revealed.

Sounds like a good Disney movie, doesn't it? The innocent-looking old woman with the poisonous apple who transforms into a bent, old witch after she carries out her deed? The evil stepmother whose image in the mirror in the end shows her true identity. The prince changed into a beast because of his arrogance, who transforms back into human form, due to his loving heart. As a matter of fact, most good folktales and fairy tales, even many great works of literature have their roots in biblical stories. And this is a short but mighty one.

Let's look at this story more closely. The poor woman had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. That's a lot of time gone by! And a long time of shaming by her community. You see, when someone suffered an ailment in Jesus' time, they were blamed. Not only blamed but shunned. Their synagogue or Temple leaders would assure them that their sin or their family's sin was the cause of their malady. And so heap after heap of shame would be put upon the sufferer, who would be cast away from community and whispered about by others.

It's no mistake that Jesus heals her "on the Sabbath," humankind's day of respite from their toils and labors, bondage and burdens. She has been set free on the very day that God declared "freedom" from toil, worry, and fret. As Jesus had told his opponents formerly, "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." All of the synoptic gospels drive home this quote more than once, for Jesus is adamant, the Sabbath was not intended to burden people but to ease their burden.

Whether the man with a withered hand or this woman bent and disabled, Jesus restores their ability to function as a vital part of their community again. Not only is their physicality restored, but their dignity, their relationships, their name, their future. Their shame has been negated, their “sin” removed, their past wiped clean, their damaged reputations restored and straightened out.

Jesus’ contemporaries accuse Jesus of bending the rules. Jesus reminds them that freeing someone from their burdens on the Sabbath IS the greatest rule. God’s rule of love and liberation trumps our petty rules and regulations hands down!

But the most important part of this interchange has to do with shame. For the woman may have had a physical ailment, but by far her heaviest burden had to be the burden of shame, caused by eighteen years—eighteen years—of accusations and abuse. That would cow anyone into submission. And sometimes unfortunately does! Restoration is greatest when shame is removed from the equation.

Professor and author Brene Brown specializes in talking with people about the burdens of shame. Her unique approach lauds people with the “courage” and “vulnerability” to share instead of bear their weaknesses and fears.<sup>[1]</sup> She wants us to know that to be vulnerable is not a weakness but a strength; it is a courageous act.

The woman Jesus healed was not ashamed to be there in the synagogue, despite her afflictions, both physical and emotional. Her spirit remained strong; her faith in him was evident. Despite all of the criticism, shame, and rebuke no doubt leveled against her by her synagogue and peers, she came faithfully every time.

Jesus did not hesitate one single moment, but righted that wrong in an instant. He straightened out the situation, made her an upright citizen once again, and declared her courageous, faithful, and freed.

To those who objected to Jesus’ interfering in their verbal stone-throwing, Jesus had something stronger to say. He accused them of treating their fellow peer far worse than they would treat an ox or a donkey. If not water your animal, how can you deprive a child of God of the Living Water of truth, love, compassion, and community. Their hypocritical stance has revealed their own “bending of God’s covenantal law” to their own devices.

The shame heaped upon their peer was now their own to bear. Jesus righted the weights of justice and straightened out the misshaping of scripture and faith that the leaders had injudiciously corrupted.

In our lives, we too suffer, sometimes occasionally, sometimes for a long time or a lifetime, the consequences of shame. For us our shame may have been put upon us by our experiences and relationships, our mishaps or misadventures. Or it may be the result of our own wrongdoing and the shame we have heaped upon ourselves as self-punishment and loathing.

But whatever bends us and burdens us, the good news is that we do not have to carry any of it any longer on our own. This is the message of the cross, and the relief of resurrection. This is the healing that Jesus provides. And Don Witt, member at St. George's since 2003, placed his trust in the Lord. Don was the 1st congregant after the Covid ban on the communion cup for communion. He asked me pleadingly, "Pastor Gail, when can we have the wine, the blood of Christ." It was soon after that I began infusing the wafers with the communion wine as a way of blending the two aspects of communion.

Instead Jesus himself (God) is the bearer of our griefs and carrier of our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). For all who come to him will experience relief of their sins, release from their burdens, healing of mind, body, and spirit, and restoration of their souls. Robyn and I both think that Don had lost his will to live. He began losing weight & felt like he was readying for his Celestial Homecoming. And on Sunday, July 31, God called him Home.

What burdens you today? Have the courage to lay it down before Jesus, to reveal to him your doubts and fears, worries, and sorrows. Show him your anxiety and your weakness. Open up your heart to receive his mercy and his grace. For Jesus did not come to punish you. You are doing all of that quite nicely all by yourself. Jesus came to save the world, to heal the world, to offer you hope and a restored and peaceful spirit.

When you dare to come before the Lord of Life with a trusting and faithful heart, he will always lovingly and gently refresh and restore your weary soul. All those who would criticize you, antagonize you, attack you, or accuse you –they will not stand a chance against the Lord of Love and Mercy.

That's why the crowd in our story for today was rejoicing!!

And that's why we need to rejoice too. And even as we mourn Don's death, we acknowledge that he is in a better place, where all aches & pains are gone. I'm pretty sure he was watching over Robyn last Sunday as she was baptized into the love of God.

For all who come to him will have their burdens lifted and their hearts filled with peace.

Amen

