



COMMUNITY  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

MINISTER  
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21<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
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LUKE 13:10-17

### Standing Up

Intro: The ranch setting is a good one for our story today, our passage from Luke sits between two well known parables in the Bible, Jesus has just told of a tree that has not produced fruit for years that is spared from the gardener's ax and given another season. In the story right after our reading the Kingdom of God is likened to the tiniest of all seeds, a mustard seed. The tree is saved, the mustard seed given a great honor much to the surprise of the original hearers. We are probably surprised as well today, as these stories nudge us out of our current thinking about what "counts". Jesus is stretching, maybe snapping the image of what is "valuable". He paints vivid pictures of contrast and possibility. Let us listen for God's word in the story of the bent over woman.

The story of Jesus healing on the Sabbath fits perfectly between the two stories that surround it. Here we see Jesus demonstrate, not in parable, but in action, that mercy and compassion count for more than the Law. Jesus is moving listeners from a sense of complacency about how things are, to an alertness and expectation that things are changing. In this time, the Law counted for everything. In order to be a good and faithful Jew one had to abide by this large and complex set of rules called the Mosaic Law. The Law governed just about every aspect of daily living.

Throughout his ministry Jesus challenged many of the rules and laws of the day. It seem anytime he got up in the synagogue, somebody would get mad at him. In two occasions before this one, he had been chased out of the synagogue and threatened with stoning because of what he said. (I for one, am glad that practice has slowed down) The message Jesus brought was often disturbing, not comforting, to the religious leaders. In our story he is challenging the interpretation of the law that deals with Sabbath keeping.

The Sabbath is a day of rest and restoration. It is a time to be free from the bondage of the physical labor of the other days of the week. God took a day off and so should we. At the heart of the controversy between Jesus and the leaders of the synagogue is "working" on the day of Sabbath. Jesus could have avoided this confrontation by not going to the woman and setting her free that day but instead seeing her another day. Come back tomorrow he could have said. Strange as it may seem, healing was seen as work. (other actions like clapping, jumping, visiting the sick, and lighting a fire are also considered work.) The leaders were not upset that Jesus was doing healings, healings which sound miraculous, it was that he was hearings on the Lord's Day, the day of rest. But his actions show us that there is no "wrong day" to do the right thing.

This woman's story reveals the compassion of Jesus. We know nothing of her, other than she has had this condition for 18 years. She did not ask to be healed, she is simply attending worship, (standing in the outer courts) but she does respond when Jesus calls to the center of the synagogue. By talking to her, touching her, interacting with her, and most of all, by calling her "daughter of Abraham," Jesus declares her to be an equal to all, not to be marginalized in any way. By naming her illness as being from Satan, he denied the common "wisdom" that illness was punishment for sin. Jesus puts an emphasis on not being hypocritical and the naming the spirits

which can leave us bent over.

There is an old story about a man who went to buy a suit at a bargain store. He tried on a beautiful suit, but found that one sleeve was too long, "no problem," said the clerk, just lower that shoulder and see how well it fits now? Then the man pointed to the misplaced buttons. "No Problem"- the clerk continued, "just twist your chest around like this and it will look fine." This went on s the man was instructed to bend his legs and hands another body parts until every flaw in the suit was corrected by adjusting his body.

Now the suit fit perfectly and the man purchased his new bargain and left the store. Limping, bent over and twisted in the suit, but still proud of his purchase the man walked past two doctors. "I wonder what neurological diseases afflicted that poor man?" One doctor asked. "I don't know" the other replied, "but doesn't his suit fit well?" Do we twist our lives in response to weights that others put on our, our that we put on ourselves in order to fit a suit that does not fit!

Jesus saw a woman bent over and calls her to come to him. He places his hands on her shoulders and he had to bend down to do so, he bent down to where she was so - he could look her in the eyes. Then he told her she was free from her infirmity and she was made straight. The woman stretched! She found that her weak back had been strengthened! She could stand tall and straight. No longer was she bent and twisted like a gnarled

tree, she was upright again. She felt alive. Imagine how she must have felt to be able to stand up and look people in the face. Spontaneously she broke into her own doxology. She gave her own thanksgiving to God. She wanted to praise God and express her sense of freedom and joy she wanted to make noise. She probably also broke Sabbath by clapping and jumping. Imagine her standing up and seeing the faces of people she had only seen the feet of for so many years? She saw joy on some faces, she saw amazement on others. But mostly she saw Jesus. She lifted her arms and praised God, she had come to worship, not knowing that she would also be healed

Notice the difference in the way which Jesus and the Pharisees approach the controversy. Jesus calls the woman over directly, and heals her. The Pharisees voice their complaints not to Jesus, they don't talk to him, but rather they shout to the crowds, saying there are other days for healing come back then. They could not or would not speak directly to Jesus. Jesus doesn't respond in kind by arguing back to the crowd in stead he directly engages the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. Jesus says "don't you untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath in order to give them water?" If it is OK to do the work of untying an animal in order to provide what it needs, is it not that much more urgent to give a human what she needs? As he speaks to the Pharisees, he shows how they are bent over with hypocrisy and can not see.

How do we respond to the radical message that grace is the over-arching aspect of God's will for us? What rules do we cling to that may be threatened by this story? Do we carry around a little voice that says in order to be a good and faithful Christian one has to..... fill in the blank.

Luke writes of an actual healing, but it does not take much to look at our own lives and relate to the idea of being bent over by something. Perhaps with our own laws that we hold for ourselves. Maybe something physical or it may be spiritual. We are each weighed down differently. Maybe we are weighted down, or held back by a lack of self-confidence, and disbelief that God can use anyone and everyone to do God's will. Maybe we say to God "What can I do? surely you want to pick someone else. But God's confidence gives the empowerment we need. Each one of us will have to wrestle with what does means to be consecrated, set apart in the context of a world which is full of bent over folks whose pain calls them into inactivity and despair? God sees in us what we don't see in ourselves. We are all set apart. We are called to stand up straight.

We do not know what the woman was suffering from. Jesus says it was necessary for him to set her free that day. This expression of necessity is the same that he uses to speak of his coming death on the cross. It had to be done. The kingdom of God is close at hand, the

ministry of delivering those who are bound up is one that continues 7 days a week. So Jesus uses the Sabbath, the special day of release from labor, as a sign of the greater release from oppression. That is what the coming of the kingdom brings, freedom, we are all being freed, untied, loosed. He sets us free from that which pulls us down. He asks to take our burdens and he will help us to stand straight. We need only to respond to his invitation to come near. And as we are a part of the body of Christ so too, are we called to be willing to go to those in need, putting people and compassion first.

This is a story of hope and promise. We are taken into the middle of a world of contrasts, a long overlooked woman is the center of Jesus attention. She is set free and called by the highest and most honored name possible – Daughter of Abraham.

Hopefully this story stirs a sense of endless possibility. The possibility of God's faithful care for us, and all of the hurting creation. May it cause us to dare to think that change is always possible; no situation is beyond hope. God can and does use even the smallest parts of creation to do great wonders. We can trust the great promises of faith that the last will be first, and for those whose life experience is full of hurt, violation, and oppression – there is freedom offered. All who long to finally stand up, will one day feel a hand on our shoulder and hear our name called and we will have the

chance to look Jesus in the eye. I need our young ranchers to help me finish here, the woman knew this that God is Real....., God is with us..... God is strong....God is awesome... and God is in Charge.  
Amen