

Worship for August 21, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship

Joshua 24:15

Choose this day whom you will serve.

**As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**

\*Hymn 321 The Church's One Foundation

Gathering Prayer

**O, Lord, our God,**

**wellspring of all that is,**

**you are the sea on which we float,**

**the wind that fills our sails,**

**the storm that buffets,**

**the calm that brings us peace.**

**Open our ears to hear your word,**

**our eyes to see your beauty,**

**our hearts to be warmed by your love.**

**Free us from the bonds of sin and selfishness,**

**and make us over to be bearers of your joy and peace. Amen.**

Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am

First Reading Psalm 71:1-6

Time With Our Young Disciples

Second Reading Luke 13:10-17

Morning Message

We find Jesus doing one of the things he does best...he's teaching. That's appropriate for this time of year. We have all been students, some of us have been teachers, and we are all interested in our young people who are off to school in this season. We pray for their success and we want to support them as they travel thru this stage of life.

In Jesus' day, the temple was the place of worship. The synagogue is the place of instruction. And Jesus is in the synagogue. Before we know it, a problem emerges: A woman has entered

who is bent over by what the scripture calls a “spirit that had crippled her for over eighteen years.”

Let’s take a moment to visualize this woman and what she must have looked like. Bent over to such an extent that she could not stand up straight. Can we imagine what that must have felt like? I imagine it would be painful. And how would she even see where she was going? How could she talk to people, shop in the market, cook for her family?

Jesus immediately sized up the situation and asks her to come to him, and proclaims that she has been set free from her ailment. He lays hands on her and immediately she stands up straight, and began praising God.

Years ago, I was introduced to a woman that I imagine looked much like the woman here in the text. Elderly, quite bent over, in fact, I’m not sure she could see much more than the ground beneath her feet as she shuffled along. But, she did walk, with help. She walked into church every Sunday of the world, assisted by her son, who was devoted to her. I watched him walk her to a pew in the sanctuary and gently get her settled with some pillows supporting her back.

Some time later, a church member shared with me that her condition was a result of what we used to call a “communicable disease.” Her husband had served in one of the branches of the armed forces during World War 1, and upon his return, had passed the disease on to his wife. I think we could rightly say, that is quite a cross to bear. Not only does this real-life woman have a physical deformity which has greatly diminished her quality of life, she bears the scars of small-town gossip and shame. How humiliating it must have been that everyone in the whole community knew her business. I’m sure I would stare at the ground, too. But, she was a woman of faith surrounded by a faithful congregation. In that, she found her strength.

In our text, Jesus reaches out and touches the bent-over woman. And she has two responses: she stands up straight and she praises God.

And for that, she is scolded. The synagogue leader just saw her as an interruption, and completely missed the miracle that has been performed right before their eyes, In his best authoritative voice, he proclaims that there are six days of the week to take care of tasks considered work.

And he admonishes the woman, and the gathered church, and Jesus, to come on those days if they wanted healing. Clearly, he saw this whole episode as interference and a definite offense to Jewish law. A real Robert’s Rules kind of guy.

But, consider this: it doesn't say anywhere in the text that this woman asked for help. It is Jesus who sees her, really sees her, and reaches out to heal her. The text says she has been crippled by a spiritual ailment. We could speculate on what that could be.

If she were a resident of this community today, what problem could have bent her, broken her?

Age and infirmity, for sure. Many of us can relate to the troublesome physiological changes brought on with each passing birthday.

Maybe she suffers from isolation. That's perfectly plausible, too, as we approach three years of this Covid era. Or maybe it's poverty, or hunger. Maybe a member of her family has fallen into addiction, which we know affects the whole family. Maybe she suffers a mental or emotional condition that prevents her from raising her head high enough to look into the eyes of another living, breathing human being. Maybe she is too beaten down to even ask for help.

We don't know. But we do know that she came to the right place. Jesus saw her, even though he was actively engaged in teaching, and her life and her need touched him, which prompted Jesus to reach out and free her from her oppression.

Now, if such a miraculous moment happened here, I expect we would all be on our feet, jumping and leaping and praising God. Well, we're Presbyterians. It would be orderly praise, right?

But, here's what's important: The kingdom of heaven is breaking in, in spite of nay-sayers. Miracles don't happen every day. We still have diseases and conditions and social ills, but Jesus has come to remind us that it won't always be that way. There is a kingdom coming, a realm in which there is no pain or sorrow or suffering, and here's a little glimpse. He even invites us to join him in ushering in this kingdom in whatever way we can.

The synagogue president missed that teachable moment. But Jesus zeroes in on it. "Hey, tell me, which one of you doesn't water your animals on the Sabbath?" Untying a rope, journeying, drawing water, all these things were considered work under the law. Work is prohibited on the Sabbath. Why is it ok to do those things. but you want to condemn this act and this woman who has received an extraordinary blessing?

She has suffered for nearly twenty years, not twenty minutes or days, or months, from something that has interrupted her life. And you can't tolerate a brief detour in the agenda?"

And he's just winding up. Jesus does something that really floors me. He calls them a name: hypocrites. Insulting, but it fits. His opponents wouldn't reform, but, many recognized the moment for what it was, and were full of praise.

I caught a story on the local news recently about a graduation ceremony for those students in Cabell County who fell short of meeting graduation requirements in the spring, but who now had met the requirements. This was possible because they attended summer school and completed the work required to be granted a diploma.

It was a high moment. You could see the smiles and hugs. You could just feel the joy.

When was the last time you saw your high school diploma? It was probably only one of the diplomas, or certificates or awards or accolades you have received in life. But, sadly, not everyone succeeds in this ol' world. Some kids have to slay dragons before they ever get to school in the morning. I'm sure that could be said of some of these graduates.

Jessica, our secretary, worked with a student all summer in order to get him to that finish line. He had a multitude of problems his senior year that interfered with his schoolwork. But, school personnel rallied around him, as they did others, and he finished his work successfully. He graduated. Jessica says he worked very hard all summer, and not only does he have a diploma, he will start nursing school this week. So, he has a diploma and a future.

The Herald-Dispatch carried this same story and quoted one young man who attended the ceremony with his child in his arms. He moved me to tears.

What we probably take for granted, he truly prized. He said, he could go on now, with his head held high. No longer bent over or broken, but having been changed.

He did the work, but, I want to believe that he was helped by kingdom people, whose desire is that all God's children can stand up, heads held high, and praise God.

\*Affirmation of Faith                      A Brief Statement of Faith, PCUSA, 1991

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.  
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,  
sets us free to love God and neighbor,  
binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.  
The same Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ  
through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of  
baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men  
to all ministries of the Church.  
In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to  
witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church**

**and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

\*Hymn 581      Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns  
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn                      Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Almighty God, from whom all blessings flow, may you find us ever-thankful for the abundance of your gifts. Accept these offerings as signs of our thanks and praise. May they serve to strengthen our commitment to know, love, and serve you this and every day. Amen.**

\*Hymn 462    I Love to Tell the Story

\*Blessing

And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,  
now and always. Amen.

\*Postlude