

“Spirit-Bent on the Sabbath”
Pentecost 14, Luke 13:10-17
August 21, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos

I. WOMAN AT THE SYNAGOGUE

A. Her Presence in Public

She shouldn't have been there. There, in the synagogue—such a public place. Didn't she know that crippled people shouldn't be so brazen? Obviously, she was demon-possessed.

Obviously, she had done some terrible thing—committed *some* sin that made her like this. She must have invited that demon spirit in all those 18 years ago.

Look at her, all bent over and only able to look at the ground. At people's feet. At her own feet, as she takes one careful step after another, sometimes bumping into things she doesn't know are in her path. You almost wonder if she looked at something she **SHOULDN'T** have all those years ago, and that is why she's been doomed to only look down; only look at the ground.

B. Brazen, Breaking the Rules

No, she shouldn't have been there. She wasn't even trying to stand back, keep out of sight. That would have been the proper thing to do. Pretty brazen just to stand out there in front of Jesus and everybody, listening to him teach, just like any regular person. Well, like any regular GUY. Women weren't supposed to concern themselves with learning the Torah. Maybe her infirmity had made her not too concerned with what was “appropriate” behavior. Maybe she just didn't care that much about following the rules. What were they going to do to her, anyway? They couldn't make it much worse. The demon spirit had already done that. Life was not so great, looking at the ground all the time.

C. Jesus Calls Her Over

Jesus doesn't seem too concerned about The Rules either. He calls her over! Right there, in front of God and everybody; right

in the middle of his sermon. For Jesus to even TALK to a woman directly in public was verboten. What was he thinking?!

Then, he has the audacity to declare that she is free! Free? What does *that* mean? Free from what? He doesn't ask anything *about* her—like how she got in that condition in the first place. Doesn't ask her what steps she has taken to try to improve her situation; to better her life. He just tells her she's free and then put his HANDS on her! That wasn't exactly “appropriate behavior” for a man either.

D. She Stands Up

Suddenly, time stops..... The air is filled with waiting, wondering. What will happen? What does it mean she is free? Why did he lay his hands on her? What will she do?

In that moment, she has a decision to make. Will she keep looking at the ground, at all the feet? Stay with the familiar? With the life as she has known it all these years?

She pauses in that loaded moment, *feels* his hands on her and knows something extraordinary has happened. Jesus has broken ALL the rules in that one act. Defied *every* law and custom he could. She has to see this man—look him in the eye—see more than his feet.

Slowly, she puts her hands on her knees and tries to lift her head up. It's been a long time—her body doesn't remember *how* to straighten. But somehow, she wills it to reach up—determined to look upon his face. She has been touched by the Holy, and she will move Heaven and earth to see what has just happened.

And now, what is this?! She's standing! Upright. *Totally* upright—straight and tall. Gazing at him, unable to believe her eyes. She starts to hear a clamor—the crowd is starting to react. Slowly, she turns her stiff neck and looks around. People are beaming, starting to cheer.

The woman begins to cheer with them. Cheering for God; praising him. Cheering for herself, cheering out of sheer amazement and thanksgiving.

II. NOT EVERYONE IS CHEERING

Then, suddenly, everything is *not* so happy. The synagogue leader busts out and starts yelling—ridiculing Jesus in front of the crowd. Demeaning him by not even talking TO him, but about him and what he’s done.

“Hey! You guys want to be healed? You come Sunday through Friday. That’s when we’re open. This is the Sabbath, and healing on the sabbath is not allowed.”

Much to everyone’s surprise, Jesus starts yelling back! “Hey! You hypocrites. You know full well you untie your ox or donkey and lead it to water on the Sabbath. I’ve done the same thing—untied, unbound this dear woman. Isn’t this daughter of Abraham more valuable than your blinkin’ animals?!”

Well, that shuts ‘em up and the party is over. For the synagogue leader anyway. The crowd can’t *help* but celebrate. They *like* this guy, this Jesus—the way he heals people; the way he breaks the rules.

III. LETTING THE CAT OUT

We’re not sure what happens after the celebration breaks out—I do wonder how the authorities responded! But before everyone comes to fisticuffs, or a brawl breaks out, let’s go back and take another look at this story. There’s something we might have missed, in our thinking all these years that this was about a crippled up old woman. Someone with scoliosis, or a spine ailment of some sort.

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a *spirit* that had crippled her for eighteen years.

A woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit

“Crippled by a spirit”—whoa! A spirit that cripples, keeps us bent, looking at the ground, or our feet, instead of out ahead, in front, and always moving forward.

Have *you* ever been kept low, weighed down, even crushed, feeling like some *force* has got ahold of you? A “spirit that cripples.” What keeps you down, hunched up, feeling like you’re under a cloud?

7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Scripture reminds us that a crippling spirit is *not* of God. It’s not based on life and living in the light of God, but is based in fear, as it pulls us in, lays us low, cripples our courage.

A Spirit of fear that binds and pushes down makes it impossible to stand up straight. Impossible to look at anything except the ground in front of us, myopic and limited. Keeps us from standing tall in Spirit and stature, and facing head-on the challenges before us.

Could it be that those giving Jesus so much grief for healing on the Sabbath, were also crippled by a spirit? Stuck in one position? *Afraid* to rise above the status quo and move into new territory? New ways of looking at things—at eye level instead of suspiciously from below?

Or, might it be that they are afraid of what might get unleashed if the oppressive thumbs aren’t kept on the back of the necks—

especially of this woman? No telling what she might do; *who* she might tell, if the rules were set aside—even for one day!

And to all who are bent down, looking with a limited vision, caught up in an oppressing spirit, Jesus responds. He goes to them—he doesn't wait for the woman to come to him for healing in this case—like most of the healing scenarios. He notices her. Takes the first step. Reaches out. Doesn't ask if she wants to be healed. Doesn't ask if she has faith. Just touches her and sets her free of the chains that bind.

Likewise, he doesn't wait for the authorities to file a formal complaint either, but just delves in and challenges *their* changes. Lifts their eyes up to a higher level, doesn't let them grovel in their old ways of seeing things and clinging to their rules that have gone awry—regulations that are harming instead of helping.

Jesus reaches out to *us*, too. Sees how we are, and where we are weighed-down. He reaches out and touches us, invites us to look up! Look out! Launch onto a path that is free from the dark clouds that threaten.

There's a saying:
Sometimes when you're in a dark place, you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That touched a one like me.
I once was bent, but now I'm tall,
Was bound, weighed-down,
looking at the ground,
but now I'm loosed, tall, reaching out—free!*

Amen.