

Sermon for the 13 Sunday of Pentecost Proper 16, August 26, 2007 Yr B
Jeremiah 1:4-10, Psalm 71:1-6, Hebrews 12:18-29, Luke 13:10-17
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It was a Saturday, Sabbath, morning and Jesus walked the prescribed half-mile to the synagogue. As he entered and was drinking a cup of coffee with Peter, James and John, he noticed a woman in the corner by her self. She was bent over and had been for about sixteen years or so, or at least that is what Peter told him. "I think she suffers from Ankylosing Spondylitis said Jesus. "You know it's a condition in which the joints and ligaments of the back become inflamed. It causes stiffness, usually starting in the lower back. Over time it may spread into the upper spine, causing joints and bones to become fused and makes the spine rigid. Did you know that about a third of all persons with A.S. may have symptoms that affect other parts of the body besides the joints and ligaments, including ones affecting the heart and blood vessels." Jesus watched her for a few moments and then walked over to her, placed his hand gently on her back and said: "Woman, the sun can't shine on your face like this. You are set free from your ailment."

That was it. The leader of the synagogue had been watching Jesus and wondering what he was going to do this day, looking for a reason to ask him to leave since he was such an upstart. The leader spoke to the crowd and reminding them of the law saying: "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day." There were murmurings of approval by some of the crowd. People need to be told that the law is the law. These young rabbi, and especially Jesus of Nazareth, had no respect for the finer points of the law. If

he had gone to a proper rabbinical school he would have known the law and how to obey it.

On the other hand, those who knew the woman were so delighted at what Jesus had done for her and were talking so loud they did not hear what the leader said. Aware that there were rumblings among the crowd Jesus asked, "What did he say?" and John told him. Jesus put down his coffee, his face was red with anger, he stood to his full height and looked straight at the synagogue leader, a small man with an even smaller mind, determined to make it clear as to who was in charge. Little did he know how his life was going to change that day.

"You hypocrite, said Jesus, looking directly at him and his followers, over the heads of a number of people. He did not yell. Yet, his voice being deep and loud boomed and echoed off the synagogue walls. There was an immediate silence. Jesus continued: "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? And 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?"

Peter, James and John were doubled up in laughter. The woman and her friends did not know what to say but they were hugging one another, laughing, thanking and praising God. Those who heard him and supported him were excited. Finally someone spoke with authority. Finally someone said what they had believed for so long, "the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath." Those who made such rigid laws were not even keeping their own laws and they knew it and now here was this upstart rabbi

who had not gone to a proper rabbinical school was confronting them with the truth and they did not like it. What was even more difficult for them was the fact that when they did confront him with scripture he could quote the wider context of their statement and point out to them the narrowness of their legalistic mind. No wonder the people had the sense of their hearts burning within them as he opened the scriptures to them.

Jesus really cared for all of them, that was the difficult part. He wanted them, the leaders, to be healers also. He wanted them to know their ability to reach out and do good, to heal, to forgive, to love. But somewhere in their training they had lost the spirit of the law and got stuck on legalism and worse, became self-important and developed an attitude that they were better than others. It was this superiority attitude that Jesus wanted them to lose so they could open their minds and hearts and realize that everyone is a child of God, that everyone has the power to forgive, to love and to heal one another.

“Don’t thank me,” Jesus said to Rebekka, as she hugged him. Thank our father in heaven. I am glad you were in the synagogue this morning that he could use me to help you and make you feel better. Now you go and heal some other folk who need help.

Jesus picked up his cup of coffee and with a few of his closest friends and a few others, they stepped outside of the synagogue and sat down on the ground to talk about what happened. Jesus explained that all of them have the ability to heal people. “Look, he said, ‘when you forgive someone a debt don’t you notice that they walk taller, that they smile more, that they seem to run rather than walk. That’s because you have healed a hole in their heart.

You have made them well. You opened your heart to them and they received your gift from our Father in heaven. You healed them as you set them free. When you forgive someone for making a mistake, you let go of the grudge you've been holding for so long and you feel free, you feel relieved, you feel healed and the person you forgive also feels free, relieved and healed. That is our father working within you. The problem is that so often you tell yourselves that you cannot do something and then that becomes a reality and you lose the gift of healing others physically even though you retain the ability to heal them emotionally and spiritually."

Jesus took a sip from his now almost cold coffee and Lazarus spoke," But, Jesus, if we were all healers then there would be no sickness in the world. And if you look around you the valley is filled with lepers, look how many people are injured from war and work injuries who will never work again, some will never walk again, some will never hear again?" Jesus put his arm around him; his smile disarmed everyone and made them feel so wonderful. "Look, Lazarus, If I could, if I had the time, I'd go down into the valley and heal every leper there, heal every blind person, every walking wounded person but that's not what I've been sent to do. I know in my heart that our Father has sent me to preach the good news. Periodically there are those who come to me, or like Rebekka this morning, whom I will heal but my mission in life is not that of a healer. But you, Lazarus, and you John, and you Susanna, Joanna, and Ann, you are healers, all of you. Why do you not trust our Father's gift and go and heal those whom you see to be in pain. I'll tell you why you don't. You're afraid of what people will think of you. You're afraid that if you heal one person you will have to heal everybody.

You're afraid of what you're family will think of you. Fear, my friends, is what limits your ability to use your gifts from our Father in heaven."

Those who disagreed with Jesus had remained inside the synagogue. They were embarrassed because they knew that, as he said, they had walked their animals that morning, and every Sabbath, and watered them. Yes it was work. Yes, they had probably walked more than half a mile. But, if everyone was allowed to do it then no one would keep the Sabbath properly, there had to be a few exceptions to the Law and since they were the leaders then it was their right and duty to protect the Sabbath.

Later in the afternoon Moses Iscariot, the brother of Judas, came to Jesus and told him what he had heard in the synagogue. "You know," said Jesus, "I can't change them. They are taking their role very seriously and they believe that they are right. But as of this morning, they know they have a choice, its either legalism or freedom. I have prayed to our Father for them and it is my hope that they will remember our Father's call through Moses in the wilderness to *choose life and have it to the full*. When I was in the desert for a few weeks I came to believe that this is the greatest freedom, to do the will of the one who sent me, I can do no more and I am convinced that this is where this power to heal comes from."

As they were talking, a small crowd of people were gathering. It was Rebekka, her family and some friends. They were spending the Sabbath praising and thanking God for the gift of healing that set Rebekka free and their newfound gift of healing. No wonder they were singing, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

"Thank God" said Rebekka, "I'm free, thank God, I'm free at last. alleluia"