

Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman  
Luke 13:10-17  
11th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C August 24, 2025  
Choptank Charge Pastor Nan Duerling

Good morning, friends. The summer is quickly drawing to a close and, with it, Nan's six years as your pastor, a period that officially ends on August 31. She will have more to say about this next week in the insert, but please know that this has been a wonderful experience for her, and she hopes for you as well.

As the summer flies by, our readings about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem are also nearing their end. As you'll recall, this season after Pentecost focuses on how we are to live as Christian disciples. Although this story of Jesus encountering a crippled woman in a synagogue is a story of healing, it also shows us how God works and what he expects of those who follow Jesus.

As today's passage opens in Luke 13:10, we find Jesus teaching in a synagogue, a scene we encounter ten times in the New Testament. All four Gospel writers locate him in a synagogue at some point or another. This is the final reference in Luke to Jesus teaching in a synagogue. In our current text, which is only found in Luke, Jesus is teaching "on the Sabbath" when an unnamed woman who had been crippled for eighteen years comes into view. Although we don't know this woman's age, or anything much at all about her, we do know that she has not been able to "stand up straight" (13:11). From a medical point of view, this description suggests that the bones in her spine were fused, causing stiffness and constant pain. From the point of view of her interaction with other people, we can assume that she was unable to look people in the eye and saw them only through sideways glances. No one spoke to her, no one, that is, except Jesus.

This woman was likely a social outcast. Remember that in Jesus' day people who had such physical challenges would be seen as sinful. Surely, they thought, she must have sinned to find herself in this condition. In contrast, Jesus teaches in other places, notably John 9:2, that sin is not the cause of physical infirmities. We're told in Luke 13:11 that it was a "spirit" that had crippled her. Notice, though, that Jesus does not perform an exorcism, but he does say in verse 16 that Satan had bound this woman (13:16).

What Jesus did was quite effective, but not the least bit dramatic. He simply called this woman to him, laid hands upon her, and told her she was "free from [her] ailment" (13:12-13). Notice that she does not approach Jesus with a request for healing. Nor does anyone else approach him on her behalf. She simply responds to his invitation to come and join him. As soon as she is healed, she immediately began to praise God. What a sight to behold! Here is a woman who for many years has likely been coming to the synagogue in this crippled state, without finding any help at all. And then, she is miraculously healed. Most of the

people in the synagogue were thrilled by what Jesus was doing.

Most, but not all. The synagogue leader was incensed! How dare this Jesus, who had no formal qualifications, come into this place of worship and heal this long-suffering woman on the Sabbath! He lectures the people (and indirectly Jesus) about the six days of the week that one could be healed without breaking any laws. But here, on the Sabbath, we see Jesus working and apparently disobeying the law.

But is he really flaunting the law? Well, that depends upon whom you ask. Although the Scriptures (Exodus 20:1-; 31:14-15; Leviticus 23:3; and Deuteronomy 5:14) say that work is forbidden, they do not clearly define what constitutes work. Carolyn Sharp reports in “Working Preacher” (2022) that thirty-nine kinds of labor are listed as no-nos in the book known as Mishnah Shabbat. These verboten activities include such things as hunting, baking, and writing, but do not speak about healing. Beyond that, rabbis did tend to agree that if life-saving measures needed to be taken, they would not be in violation of the law. However, Jesus was known to heal people on the Sabbath who had chronic conditions, such as this crippled woman, or the man with the withered hand (Luke 6:6-11), or the man with dropsy, which we would call fluid retention (Luke 14:1-6). These were hardly life-threatening emergencies. That distinction puts the healer Jesus on questionable legal grounds, at least according to the synagogue leader here.

In response to the leader’s insistence that healing needed to be done on the other six days of the week, Jesus called him and his associates “hypocrites.” Note that in Luke 13:15, Jesus is not referred to by his name but as Lord. That title seems to lift him above the synagogue leader. Jesus argues that even on the Sabbath, people untie their animals so that they can get water. Thus, Jesus says, if animals can get water on the Sabbath, can’t people be healed on the Sabbath too? His argument does seem perfectly logical.

Jesus makes another interesting point when he refers to this woman as “a daughter of Abraham” (13:16). This phrase is meaningful because the hunched-over woman’s physical condition and the fact that she is on the margins of her community do not, as far as Jesus is concerned, bar her from being part of the people of the covenant. Even though others apparently ignore her, and she herself says nothing about her faith, Jesus perceives her as being worthy of God’s healing mercy. He obviously sees her as a valuable individual and member of the covenant community.

But what about the synagogue leader and his cohorts? Luke records that Jesus’ “opponents were put to shame” (13:17). In contrast to the leader, who was railing against Jesus, “the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing” (13:17). So here we have two very different responses to the same healing action on the part of Jesus. Are there any lessons for us here?

Maybe we need to look a bit deeper for motivation. Does the leader truly want to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath? No reason is given in Luke 13, but if we

turn back to Luke 6: 7, we read,

the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath so that they might find an accusation against him.

Now, Jesus knew what they were up to, but he healed the man with a withered hand anyway. In verse 11, we read that they (the religious leaders) were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Hmm! It doesn't seem as if the religious establishment is as concerned with keeping the Sabbath holy as it is about finding ways to entrap Jesus. What the leaders are doing certainly seems wrong, yet from their perspective they can't have an itinerant rabbi running round acting as if it is unnecessary to follow Sabbath rules.

Let's look first at the leaders' understanding of the Sabbath. They focus their attention on strict adherence to the law, or, more aptly phrased, their interpretation of the law, which often comes from sources outside of the Bible. In contrast, Jesus sees the Sabbath as a gift from God, a time for rest and renewal. He doesn't perceive Sabbath as being about following a long list of rules. Jesus sees the emphasis as being on mercy, compassion, and acts of healing that are in keeping with God's will. Looked at from his perspective, Sabbath is a day of rest and liberation; it is not a day to keep score on how closely one follows the rules, many of which were made by people to start with. These people had their own power, and one can only assume that they were doing all they could to hold onto this power.

The biblical understanding of "Sabbath" is found in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Both passages emphasize observing the Sabbath, but they do so for different reasons. Writing in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Vol. 3. page 384), Professor Charles Raynal explains:

The communal function of both human rest from work to acknowledge the Lord's sanctification of the Sabbath and the human activity of observance and keeping the holiness of the Sabbath is to give institutional and communal foundation to both tables of the law: to honor and worship God alone and to render justice to the neighbor. This Deuteronomic understanding of holiness is at the heart of the Old Testament prophetic traditions.

What about you? How do you view the Sabbath? Very possibly some of you grew up in homes where activities such as washing or mending clothes, playing games, or social encounters, such as dancing, were prohibited. Those rules have greatly relaxed, but focusing on the love of God and love of neighbor are still of paramount importance in our denomination.

So, too, is the importance of cultivating what Charles Wesley referred to as "Jesus' bosom friends," that is, those who are poor, imprisoned, children, the powerless, and the vulnerable. The woman in today's story certainly falls under the category of "vulnerable." Since there is no mention of a family caring for her,

we might surmise that she is also alone and poor. Women in Jesus' days had no means of livelihood and, even if they did, they lived in a time and place where workplace accommodations were unheard of. It was up to the community of faith to care for such persons who had no husbands, sons, brothers, or fathers to watch over them.

Undoubtedly, this woman is oppressed in several different ways. First, she is a woman, which means that in Jesus' day she had no authority of her own. Just who she depended on (if anyone) is not made clear. Second, she is handicapped. The word used is literally translated "weakness." We have no idea if she sought medical treatment. We only know that it was Jesus' kind hands that were able to heal her. And third, it does not appear that she received what we would call "pastoral care" from the synagogue. From what we can tell, she was marginalized, even there. The religious leader was more concerned about rules than about caring for God's flock.

What, then, does this story prompt you to do? We can all pray for people who are ill. We can offer them comfort by means of calls, cards, even food. But perhaps most importantly, we can recognize that they are beloved children of God, who we need to be cared for as well. Jesus didn't hesitate to reach out to those who were sick in body, mind, or spirit. And neither should we. While we may not be able to heal them, we can all certainly "be there for them," just as Jesus was there for this woman.

Love, Nan