

2022 08 21 - A Healing Touch

Scripture: Luke 13:10-17 (The Inclusive Bible)

It was Saturday, the Jewish day of rest, their holy day, and Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. Synagogues, in those days, didn't have a lot of seating. There were usually benches along the side and back walls and maybe a few more in front of a raised platform where the rabbi stood to speak. These benches were for the "important people," probably the most learned scholars or the rich merchants in town. Everyone else just sat on the floor or stood on the edges of the congregation. <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/synagogues-of-jesus-time>

As he was teaching, Jesus looked around and noticed a woman in the congregation. This particular woman was hard to miss because she was so disabled that she was bent over double, her spine so misshapen that she was unable to stand up straight. It would have been very difficult for her to sit on the floor, and, no doubt, she wasn't "important enough" to get a seat on a bench. So when Jesus saw her, the bent over woman was probably standing near the edge of the crowd, situated so that she wasn't blocking anyone else's view.

According to our scripture reading, the woman had been sick for eighteen years. We don't know why she was so physically disabled. The only reason given was that her ailment was "caused by a spirit." There are several medical reasons why someone's spine might be bent. What diseases do you know that could cause such an affliction? (wait for answers – arthritis, osteoporosis, degeneration of the disks, a break or a fracture that hadn't healed properly).

We could also wonder if the woman's spirit-caused illness was more psychological or emotional in origin. Just imagine all the reasons why someone might feel so burdened or saddened or ashamed that they would walk around with their head hanging down or their shoulders' hunched. When I was a teenager, my mother threatened to put me in a brace if I didn't stand up straight. When you are as tall as I am—several inches taller than most of your friends—then it's easy to fall into a habit of rolling one's shoulders in order to feel less conspicuous.

I was thinking about today's scripture passage this week when I came across a picture of a sculpture made up of seventy-five naked women bent over, sitting and even lying on the ground in various states of despair (next screen). This sculpture is called Dark Elegy and it was created by a woman named Suse Lowenstein. All the women depicted in this sculpture, including the artist herself, lost loved ones when Pan Am Flight 103 went down in the ocean near Lockerbie, Scotland on December 21, 1988. The sculpture portrays the emotions those women felt when they first heard the news of their loved one's brutal murder.

<http://www.darkelegy103.com/>

There are so many physical, emotional or psychological burdens that can cause us to be or to feel bent over (next screen)

When Jesus saw this disabled woman in the synagogue, he called her over. In many of the stories in the Gospels Jesus is approached by someone who

- pushes through the crowd to touch his clothing,

- interrupts his meal to beg for healing or
- falls to the ground in front of him to get his attention.

But in this case, it is Jesus who takes the initiative, Jesus who invites the bent over woman to come to the front of the room.

I believe this demonstrates the fact that we don't always have to push others aside or make a spectacle of ourselves to get God's attention. But we do have to show up. Jesus would never have noticed her if the bent over woman had decided to stay at home that day. By being present she demonstrated her openness to the Spirit, her willingness to be healed. Sometimes that's all it takes: to show up to God, to be open to the possibility of new life.

Jesus said, "Woman you are free from your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight." Obviously, for most of us, healing will never be that immediate or that complete. But, where the power of God's love is concerned, everything and anything is possible.

As soon as she stood up straight, the woman began thanking God. She didn't thank Jesus, or any other person in the synagogue, she thanked God. This woman knew that the power she felt when Jesus touched her was not the power of a man, but rather a sacred power, the power of a Spirit of love and healing.

Jesus came to this earth to teach us the Good News of the power of God's love in our lives. He taught us not only through his preaching and his acts of healing but also through the way that he lived his life and, in particular, the way that he

dealt with those who oppressed him and stood in the way of his healing touch. When the leaders of the synagogue got up from their benches of honour to suggest that Jesus had broken one of God's commandments, he reminded them that God's laws were about freedom not oppression. He said, "You hypocrites! Which of you doesn't let your ox or your donkey out of the stall on the Sabbath to water it? This daughter of Sarah and Abraham has been in the bondage of Satan for eighteen years. Shouldn't she have been released from her shackles on the Sabbath?"

Yes, it's still true that the Sabbath is a day for rest and rejuvenation, a day for reconnecting with the Holy, a day when we are released from many of the burdens that we carry the rest of the week. Our Sunday Sabbath is not another burden that we need to carry or another barrier that we need to overcome, it is instead, a healing gift from God.

Like the bent-over woman we are called to open our hearts and our minds to the possibility of letting go, of being healed from whatever is holding us in bondage, whatever is burdening us and causing us to bend under the strain. We are called to show up, to open our hearts and our minds to the power of God's liberating love.

And, like Jesus, we are called to be conduits of God's love, to offer the healing touch of the Spirit to others. To provide a place of love and support, of healing and safety to those people in our lives who are struggling under heavy burdens.

We are called to ignore the barriers of ignorance or pride or fear or uncertainty and to reach out with the healing touch of love.