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Sermon for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

Preached at Christ the King Evangelical Lutheran Church – Houston, TX

August 24th, 2025

**Luke 13:10-17**

**10Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” 15But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! 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? 16And 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?” 17When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.**

Students all over are moving into dorms, residence halls, and apartments preparing for what might be their first semester of college. Others may be gearing up not for their first semester, but for a semester that gets them one step closer to graduation. Schedules are being checked, commutes are being planned and timed out – whether they involve interstates or brisk walks from dorm to academic building. Faculty are fine-tuning lesson plans, refreshing student roster pages, and rallying with colleagues for the start of a new Academic Year. University staff across all divisions and auxiliary services are prepping supplies for welcome-week events, signature programs, and student support initiatives of every kind.

In the minds of each person in the groups named above I imagine there are questions like:

1. How will this semester go?
2. Will I find new friends among classmates or roommates or student clubs?
3. Will students enjoy and maybe even learn something from my class?
4. Will students enjoy the programs we offer? Will they feel supported, cared for, and like an important part of our university community?

These questions rise up in an attempt to address much tenderer questions: What will people think of me? How will I be perceived? How will I be defined?

More than just questions of likeability or popularity, these questions reflect the significance of connection and relationship, of life within community, and the need to be seen, known, and valued. The way other people and groups perceive and define us have very real impact on our sense of self, safety, and belonging. How WE define ourselves also matters and shapes our internal narrative, the beliefs we have about ourselves, and the way we carry ourselves in the world.

In our Gospel text today, we encounter people defined in a multitude of ways, internally and externally. We encounter leaders of the synagogue who define themselves as experts in the law. We encounter a woman, defined by the author of this Gospel account as someone who is bent over with a spirit that has crippled her for 18 years. We encounter the gathered crowd who likely define themselves as faithful followers of Jewish tradition and law. And we encounter Jesus, defined by some as teacher, others as false prophet, still others as miracle worker, and by himself as Son of the Most High God sent *“…to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed…[[1]](#footnote-1)”*

In this text Jesus is also defined as a healer, freeing the woman with the bended back from her ailment.

This is not the first of Jesus’ healings, nor will it be the last, yet it is important to note the ways that this – and other healing texts – from scripture can cause harm despite their use in proclaiming the Gospel good news. A former campus ministry student shared between HouMin and the Episcopal Campus Ministry at the University of Houston, is now enrolled in seminary and engaged in the work of disability theology. As someone who has epilepsy and is Deaf/Hard of Hearing (HoH) they bring a unique interpretative lens to accounts of healing found throughout scripture and particularly in the New Testament.

In a paper they have written - which is in review for official publication - they state that:

*“…accounts of Jesus’ miraculous healings…can be used to construct a dangerous landscape of oppressive theology for people living with disabilities in a modern era if interpreted through a sliding scale of morality-based worth in abled vs. disabled bodies. Without thorough explication these stories can appear to be a theological rejection of disabled bodies or an impairment of spiritual wholeness that builds barriers between human frailty and divine perfection.[[2]](#footnote-2)”*

That is to say, that without proper care and careful interpretation, the message of these healing accounts could be understood as: people who are ill, injured, crippled, disabled must be “healed,” in order to be fully incorporated into society and more than that the Kingdom of God. From this easily comes the theologically inaccurate and deeply harmful assumption that “To be made in the image of God was to be physically without blemish and able-bodied…[[3]](#footnote-3)”

What Waltz-Reasonover proposes later in their article is a re-framing and re-defining of the words “cure” and “healing,” to move away from existing harmful interpretations and teachings on healing accounts throughout scripture. Bear with me for one more citation from their article! Calling upon the writings of Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris in their book *Making a World of Difference: Christian Reflections on* Disability, Waltz-Reasonover proposes that we understand the word cure, as “…a gaining of physical function…” and healing as “…liberation and restoration to community with or without the presence of a physical cure.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

From this framework we can begin to understand and interpret this story as not just a medical miracle, but rather another instance of the Kingdom of God breaking into the world through the radical and boundary crossing love of Christ.

In this Gospel text we witness Jesus calling out to the woman in the synagogue, defined only by her physical appearance and the description of a long-lasting ailment, and inviting her forward to join him. Jesus calls her “woman,” and then later, “Daughter of Abraham,” and finally one who has been “set free…from bondage.[[5]](#footnote-5)”

Jesus defines her by her humanity and her identity as a child of God’s beloved covenant people and in doing so reminders her, and all those gathered, that ultimate identity and worth comes only from God. Jesus heals this woman by liberating her from the bondage of the way society has defined her - afflicted, crippled by a spirit, bent over – and casting upon her through the laying on of hands, the identity of Beloved Child of God.

Jesus liberates her from the community’s perception and belief that she is nothing more than someone with physical struggles who should be left on the fringes of their society so as not to trouble or discomfort them. It is this exile and isolation that dis-ables the woman from her participation in a full and abundant life rich with the relationships and connections God desires for each of us.

In seeing and calling forward this woman who has been exiled and marginalized, Jesu dis-ables the community’s perception and definition of the woman. Jesus makes it clear that this woman is defined first and foremost as someone worthy of God’s time, attention, and love. Jesus liberates this woman from the bondage of the community’s judgement and exclusive behavior, and it is only then that she is able to stand straight, that is firm, among her community.

Named and claimed as beloved of God above all other titles, this woman stands up and is re-oriented to God’s love. She is En-abled, to once again live a full and abundant life, having been restored fully to her community.

In this healing turned liberation the woman is pulled from a place of exile and otherness and brought back into the fold of her community. And with her, all those gathered also find themselves restored to community. Community formed anew as they turn away from the false-idols of division and understand that through Christ, all are united in the love of God into beloved community.

Upon this healing and restoration to wholeness and abundance of life through community, the woman begins to immediately praise God!

…the leaders of the synagogue though? The ones who define themselves as experts in the law? They immediately begin speaking against what Jesus has done as it has violated their understanding of what it means to keep the sabbath.

In a brief commentary written on this gospel text, Rev. Kurt Lammi, writes that “…the leader of the synagogue…is upset that Jesus isn’t observing the sabbath ‘correctly.’ Jesus, though, is more focused on how this woman’s ailment should not be what defines her…[[6]](#footnote-6)” In true Jewish form, Jesus proposes an alternate interpretation of the law, not to avoid following it, but to allow God’s desire for all people to “…have life and have it abundantly[[7]](#footnote-7)” to be fulfilled. Jesus responds to the synagogue leader and the gathered crowd with, yes, some frustration, but also a question that invites those gathered to reflect on their interpretation of the law. He asks them, you lead your livestock to water on the sabbath as an act of care to them – why do you begin to object to this act of care and liberation being offered to this woman? Why is it that you define your livestock as more worthy of care than this woman?

When faced with this question, the author of this Gospel account writes that “…all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.[[8]](#footnote-8)” Jesus invited the leader of the synagogue and all who were gathered to consider a new understanding, a new defining, of the Sabbath, and in doing so demonstrated the availability of the goodness of God for everyone – not just those deemed worthy by imperfect human standards. When we define others, and ourselves, as bearers of the Image of God and recipients of God’s love through Christ Jesus our Lord, how might our lives be changed? This community? This church? The world?

I invite you all to take a moment and consider all the things that we use to define others and ourselves. Success, family, job title, physical conditions, accomplishments, etc. What about this congregation? What are the things that define Christ the King Evangelical Lutheran Church?

I know that right now it might seem that staff and leadership transitions feel like the overwhelming answer to that question. There is no denying the difficulty of those things and the work of discernment and dreaming that lies ahead.

And – I invited you to take a moment and breathe deeply the breath of God, the breath of the Spirit, and remember your identity in Christ. To remember that it is the love, grace, and mercy of God, given to us through Christ Jesus our Lord, that defines us and restores us, time and time again, to wholeness. And there is nothing that can ever separate us from that love. Absolutely nothing.

As you all continue to pray, discern, and dream about the next chapter of ministry for Christ the King, take heart in knowing that your value and worth as a congregation is not made or broken by transitions in leadership or changes in ministry. Hold firm to the truth that this congregation is defined only by its faithfulness to the Gospel and willingness to continue in the work of Beloved Community.

The love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord is alone our hope and our salvation. This is the message I leave with you and the message I will carry on to students, faculty, and staff this semester. May we all be united in the ministry God has called us to which defines everyone as Beloved and moves us into right relationship with one another. Amen.

1. Luke 4:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Waltz-Reasonver, Phoenix; “Accessibility and Restoration in Mark 7:24-37: Epilepsy and a Proposal for Deaf Theology.”(June 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 13:12;16 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “*Sundays and Seasons: Preaching 2025, Year C.”* pg. 229; Augsburg Fortress (2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John 10:10b [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Luke 13:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)