

Healing that Leads to Praise
Luke 13:10-17
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I am not going to spend a great deal of time saying goodbye because to me this just feels like a transition. I'm moving from one chair or pew to another. I am ending this chapter of my life on the pastoral staff of SFBC, I will continue to be a member and continue to worship here after a season of rest. Instead of me sitting in the front pew, I will most likely sit toward the back.

Many have asked what I'm going to do. My main agenda for now is to get some rest. After 33 years of denominational work and travel, I retired into COVID and working with, not at one, but two churches. Now, I will only have one church where I will work part time. That is Mount Zion on 19th and Madison, less than a mile away.

I will also continue to serve as a co-chair of the Seattle Community Police Commission. I will do my part to advocate for police accountability and unbiased policing among at-risk communities. Being in need or in danger and calling 911 should not end in a death sentence if one has black, or brown skin, or poor, or has mental health needs. Amen somebody.

The balance of my time I will be enjoying life with my spouse, the Rev. Dr. Renee McCoy and taking care of my pups—Howard Thurman and Harper Lee. I will also be caring for my father Julian who is in assisted living. In the past two and a half years, I haven't had time to play or even watch television. So I look forward to a slower pace. If you know of a show I need to stream, please let me know what I've missed the past 2+ years.

I am so grateful that the Rev. Dr. Tim Phillips is here today. It is because of him that I have served this congregation for the past seven years. In 2015 he asked if I would come on staff and work with the women of the congregation, participate in the Women's retreat, and do some preaching. I was intrigued by the offer and agreed I would try it for 3 months. Well, the three months has finally ended after seven years. It has been a very good ride and I am indebted to this congregation for your love and support. Pastor Anita, thank you for your creativity and energy in ministry. You have done amazing work here. Pastor Mario, I hardly got to know you and now I'm leaving. May God's blessings be with you as you served in this vineyard.

Now, I don't want to be here all afternoon, and I'm sure you don't either. And most importantly, I hear there are cookies downstairs. So let me hurry on to my text which is the lectionary text for today.

Our text begins, ***and then there appeared a woman with a spirit that crippled her. She was bent over and unable to stand up straight.*** This woman whose name we do not know, had a spirit that impacted her physically. How many of us carry spiritual,

emotional, or physical wounds or burdens that weigh us down? Sometimes our burdens weigh us down for decades. Our spiritual and emotional burdens can have physical manifestation. We can't sleep, have a sore neck, back issues, irritable bowels, high blood pressure, panic attacks, anxiety, etc, etc, etc. I recently read a meme that said,

You're not lazy, unmotivated, or stuck. After years of living your life in survival mode, you're exhausted. There's a difference.

That's it! We are exhausted, bent and broken from living in survival mode these past three years! We are still in a COVID pandemic and now monkey pox is on its heels. (And, I wish we could find another name for this new virus.) Gun violence fueled by white supremacy, and mental health issues is everywhere. It takes enormous energy to manage the threat of violence and fear every single day. We go into grocery stores, movie theaters, schools and churches making mental note of where are the exits.

I attended a Community Police Commission meeting this week. The first thing I did before selecting my seat was to locate the exits in the room only to find out one of the two exits in our room was locked. That meant there was only one way in and one way out. I was not a happy camper, and it is exhausting being hyper vigilant.

Unfair and biased policing has made us some of us in marginalized communities leery of calling the police even when we need help.

Inflation and high gas prices have forced many to choose between buying food, paying a light bill, or buying school clothes for the children and paying the skyrocketing rent. And now we have to fight again for young people to have the right to make reproductive health care choices about their own bodies. Yes, our spirit is bent, broken, and crushed. We are exhausted! We are this unnamed woman in this text. She has no name, but we know her because we are her!

Jesus saw this unnamed woman while he was in his place of worship. Yes, **Jesus saw her** and her condition. Jesus saw her and the burden she carried 24/7 365 days a year. Jesus saw her and the weight of the world that kept her from walking upright and pain free. Jesus saw her.

This unnamed woman was bent, broken and exhausted I'm sure. She was not jumping up and down like blind Bartimaeus in the gospels trying to get Jesus' attention. She did not reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' garment like the woman with the issue of blood. She didn't have an advocate to speak out on her behalf like the centurion did for his paralyzed servant. The woman who shall go unnamed was minding her own business. She had resigned herself to live one more day in pain, broken, and bent when Jesus saw her.

This unnamed woman had grown accustomed to not being seen. She had come to her place of worship for 18 years and no one saw her or spoke to her about being healed. I wonder how long must some of us come to worship at SFBC and not be seen, heard, or

understood by those who have been here for 20 years or more? How long must we show up for worship, give our offering, and wait our turn to serve on certain committees. Well, Jesus thought being ignored for 18 years was long enough.

It is comforting to be reminded that no matter our condition, no matter our age, no matter our physical, or mental ability, **God sees us**. We don't have to jump up and down and act a fool for God to see us. God sees you, and you, and you and me.

Jesus **saw** her and **healed** her. Jesus healed her even before he touched her. There was no mention of her past, or the number of husbands she had, or how much money she spent trying to get well, or any sin or transgression she made. Jesus didn't try to make an example of her or tell her to pray more. Jesus didn't tell her she needed more faith; he just wanted her to be **free** of what bound her for 18 years. Her past didn't matter. The amount of faith she had didn't matter. She was a child of God who needed to be healed—who needed to be set free. Jesus saw a condition he could fix, and he fixed it. End of story, full stop.

Sometimes we have resources to end another's pain and suffering yet before we decide to help, we want the 411 on how girlfriend got in such a bad place. Lawd, have mercy, what happened! Honey, what did you do? What did the doctor say? If I were you, I'd file a lawsuit! Friends, we don't need to know the details. We just need to care, to help where we can, and to heal.

Sometimes we have the resources and knowledge to lift a burden, but we pretend we don't see because we don't want to be bothered. And we rationalize our inaction by saying, what is the point, they will be back in the same situation by the end of next week. But Jesus saw her and knew he could help her feel better immediately! So he healed on the spot without hesitation.

Now, you would think that whenever a child of God is healed and released from her burdens that **everyone** would rejoice. You would think...but it ain't necessarily so, as the song says.

The religious leader was outraged at Jesus and all those who came for healing. Do you think the religious elder could have been a bit jealous that he was not the center of attention? After all he was the senior pastor! The religious leader tried to wrap his indignation in their religious rules and norms. The leader said, six days you can come for healing, but the seventh day is sacred, and no work is to be done on that special day. Come back tomorrow if you want to be healed.

Biblical scholar Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. wrote in *Feasting on the Word* The control of religious (Sabbath) practice...represented a convenient way of maintaining an oppressive system whereby some people are forced to endure perpetual suffering by others who are more concerned with sustaining a system that benefits them than alleviating the burdens of those it cripples.

In other words, the religious leader didn't care about sacred practice. He only cared about being in control.

Whenever there is a constant appeal to the law, the constitution, the by-laws, policies and procedures, someone is trying to block the work of the Spirit. Now the law, constitutions, and policies and procedures are important documents and give structure to institutions. We need them. But let's be clear the Holy Spirit is not bound by our rules or our laws.

The Holy One does not check our bylaws, article 4; section 3; paragraph 1 or our policies and procedures to see if it is OK to heal a broken heart, or to offer forgiveness, or to set the captive free.

I imagine Jesus did a double-take and said, now what sense does that make. You want all these hurting broken people, to go home and come back later in the week, just to make you happy? It made no sense that the very law that was created to celebrate the liberation of God's people from slavery and abuse would be used to oppress and beat down those in need of freedom.

Religious literalism is a dangerous thing. The letter of the law is maintained when the spirit of the law is desecrated. Jesus said, you tithe, dill, mint, and cumin, but the weightier things, the more important part of the law you ignore—like doing justice, being merciful, and walking humbly with God.

Jesus said, it doesn't matter what the day is on the calendar, **today** is a good day for healing. Our sacred days of worship are always good days to be set free. And oh by the way, Monday is a good day too—so is Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Jesus said in Luke 4,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because she has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
She has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

My friends Jesus came to set us all free. Jesus went to calvary and paid a debt he didn't own because we had a debt we couldn't pay. And because Jesus paid it all and made a way for us, we can stand up straight and declare healing over our trauma and other people's drama. Because of Jesus we can declare healing and victory over those who want to keep us down and living in the margins. In Jesus, we can declare healing over generational curses and our addictions that trap our body, our minds, and our spirits. In Jesus, we can declare victory over bad relationships, personal insecurities, and negative self-talk.

My friends sometimes the battles we keep fighting and losing are not ours. They are the Lord's. Let God do what God can do. For some of our battles are not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in high places. God will fight our battles. We are to claim victory and healing in Jesus' name.

Beloved ones, Jesus sees us just as we are and sets us free to be the wonderful creations that God made us to be. Shake off what other people want you to be and be who God created you to be. Stand tall and stand straight because when God created you, God said that is good,

Praise God that we can name our exhaustion and get some rest.

Praise God that we can find our peace in Jesus.

Praise God that we can find our hope and our purpose in the one who called us into being.

Praise God that trouble don't last always.

We are partners with God in the sacred work of healing. Each one teach one. Each one heal one. Each one set another free. We have work to do. Jesus saw the woman with no name and healed her. Let us partner with God and be instruments of healing and grace to all we meet. And all God's people said, amen.