

Luke 13 (10-17)

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

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*“And 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. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”*

***“Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen. Glory Hallelujah.”***

Sometimes I think that to see someone, to really, truly see someone exactly as they are and to meet them exactly where they are is the greatest gift we can give or receive. And I will take it even further—truly seeing someone is a glimpse into the face of God. Attention and attunement are expressions of Divine Love. And feeling unseen, unheard, unimportant can feel like those familiar words of Psalm 22 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me..O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night but find no rest.” I bet everyone here today knows what it’s like to be seen, acknowledged, affirmed. And what it’s like to feel unseen, disregarded, disposable. And you don’t need me to tell you that this global epidemic of loneliness we are living through is a threat to our very survival. And that wars are being fought and lives are being lost because we refuse to see each other. Lord give us eyes to see each other as you see us.

So, who was this woman who Jesus sees while he was teaching in the synagogue? Why her? What is it about her that commands his attention, that propels him to break the law and heal on the sabbath? Usually, the gospels tell of people seeking Jesus, shouting, crawling, reaching. But this story is different. This woman says nothing. She doesn’t move toward him. Perhaps she couldn’t. Perhaps the weight of her shame and her silence was too much. And yet, Jesus sees her. Jesus moves toward her. Jesus begins the healing she could not even imagine for herself. “Woman, you are set free from your ailment!”

Many of you know the book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel van der Kolk. It’s a profound exploration about how trauma imprints itself on our bodies. Van der Kolk writes, “Trauma isn’t just something that happens in the past—it leaves its mark on the body, shaping how we carry ourselves, how we breathe, even whether we can lift our heads.” This woman had been bent over for eighteen years: Luke tells us twice, almost as if to underline the weight of it. In Jewish tradition, the number 18 symbolizes *life itself*. So, for eighteen years, her very life had been bent down. Bound by Satan, unable to look up, even into the face of Jesus. Especially into the face of Jesus.

***“Sometimes I’m up, sometimes I’m down; oh yes Lord, sometimes I’m almost to the ground. Oh yes Lord.”***

Sometimes we cannot lift our eyes, out of shame, or grief, or trauma. But the Gospel Truth is this: when we cannot look at God, God looks at us. Now I don’t know if this woman’s ailment was physical or spiritual or mental, or a combination of all of those things. But what I do know is that Jesus gives her dignity by calling her “*daughter of Abraham*.” She is seen, named, restored to her community. And what I do know is that she was set free, and her entire community rejoiced, because perhaps they were also set free.

When I was in 8th grade I moved from my mother's house in Fayetteville, North Carolina to my grandparents' home in Mooresville, North Carolina 3 hours away. There were things going on at home that made it necessary for me to move but I was miserable in Mooresville. It was the middle of the school year and aside from my grandparents I didn't know a single human being in this small southern town. I couldn't eat or sleep, I couldn't look anyone in the eyes. I felt utterly alone and abandoned. I was 13 years old. I think today I would be diagnosed with depression but I didn't have the vocabulary for that back then. I would go to school and at lunch I would sit at the end of the popular kid's table, close enough that people would think I was part of the group, desperately praying that no one noticed me. But one boy did. He **saw** me. At first, he sat kind of near me and gradually moved closer until he was right beside me. He very carefully started talking to me, clearly sensing my fear and loneliness. And so I had one friend. And he saved me. I don't remember that boy's name. But today I know it was Jesus.

"When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God."

When I think about today's Gospel and this woman's story, I can't help but think of the poet and activist Andrea Gibson, who died this year on July 14 after fighting cancer with breathtaking honesty and courage. Andrea Gibson was tough and prickly and gentle and open and fully human. And perhaps a bit divine. Andrea knew about bodies that keep the score. Andrea knew what it meant to be bent down by grief, by illness, by fear, and still to rise. They once wrote, "Trauma was not being able to get the hands of the clock off me. Healing was learning no one has ever laid a fingerprint on the part of me that's infinite." How marvelous is that. Beloved people of Calvary, the Jesus who knows us as Children of God, our most pure, most true, most infinite identity, is calling us to be set free of whatever bondage enslaves us on **this** Sabbath Day. Free from addiction, free from shame, free from trauma, free from greed. Free from racism, free from sexism free from homophobia. Jesus is calling us into relationship with Him and relationship with each other. The last verse of today's gospel says, "When 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." The very very good news of the Gospel is that we never have to do any of it alone. Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate sets us free. Calvary, I dare you this week, this month, this year, to see someone else with new eyes, maybe it's your child or your sibling or your parent you just don't understand, maybe it's the refugee being kidnapped from the only home they know, maybe it's the child in Gaza. Maybe it's **you**. I invite you to see as Jesus sees. Because when you do, when you become the eyes and hands and feet of Jesus, I promise you that in that seeing, the seeing of others, you will see Jesus. And that sight will reorient your entire life.

All my life, I heard the spiritual 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen' only as a song of lament, a cry from the depths. But today, I hear it as a victory call, a declaration that Christ sees us even when we can't look up, and a song of praise that ends with a triumphant *Glory Hallelujah*. So I invite you to sing the refrain with me, and to sing it like you know Jesus sees and knows and loves you.

***"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Glory Hallelujah."***