

Sermon on Luke 13:10-17
Sunday August 24 2025
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Eighteen years is a long time to live bent over. The woman in today's Gospel could hardly remember what it felt like to stand tall, to look someone in the eye without straining sideways. Her world had become the ground beneath her feet—the dust of the road, the sandals of those who passed by. Conversations were awkward; she caught glimpses of faces only from the corner of her eye. Some pitied her. Others avoided her altogether, as if her condition might be contagious.

Everyday tasks weighed heavily. Carrying water, preparing food, even moving through a crowd felt like climbing a mountain. And though her body was weary, her spirit was wearier still. She may have wondered: Had she done something to deserve this? Was she cursed, forgotten, bound by a force stronger than her prayers?

And yet, Sabbath after Sabbath, she went to the synagogue. Her back was crooked, but her faith still bent toward God. She did not come expecting miracles—she had long since learned to live without hope of change. Still, she came to hear Scripture, to be near her community, to believe, somehow, that God still saw her, even when others did not.

The story of this bent-over woman is not just about a miraculous healing. It is about perspective, belonging, Sabbath freedom, and the expansive compassion of God revealed in Christ.

Luke emphasizes the length of her suffering: eighteen years. Long enough for her condition to feel permanent, long enough for it to shape her very identity. She had grown used to approaching people at waist level, speaking from below, glancing sideways. Imagine the weight of such a life: the physical pain, the social alienation of being marked “different,” the spiritual questions that gnawed at her faith. And yet—there she was, still showing up at the synagogue. Bent over, yes. Marginalized, yes. But still present. Her posture was low, but her persistence was a quiet testimony of faith.

And then, the turning point: Jesus sees her. She is not hidden. She is not invisible. In a society where people with physical differences were often ignored or shamed, Jesus notices her and calls her forward. He does not expose her to ridicule. He does not sensationalize her healing. Instead, he leans down, meets her sideways gaze, and says, “Come here.”

For eighteen years, her eyes had been trained downward. Now Jesus reorients her vision. His attention affirms: You belong. You are not forgotten. You are a daughter of Abraham.

And here is the truth that cuts close to home: her story is also our story. Because in one way or another, we are all bent over. Not all of us in body, but many of us in spirit. We are bent by sin, guilt and shame. We are bent by regret and grief. We are bent beneath the weight of injustice, anxiety, fear. We all carry burdens that bow us down. And just like her, we long to be seen, named, and lifted up by the One who restores.

This is gospel truth: Jesus sees the ones we overlook. And Jesus sees us, in our brokenness, in our bending. His seeing is never passive—it is active, invitational, healing.

The words he speaks matter. Jesus does not say, “Be healed,” though healing occurs. He says, “You are set free.” This is about more than muscle and bone; it is about liberation. It is release from whatever chains have kept us from living fully.

Freedom, in fact, is central to Luke’s Gospel. At the very beginning, Jesus unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and proclaimed:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19).

Now, in this synagogue, that mission takes flesh again. For this woman, freedom comes on the Sabbath. The day of rest becomes a day of release. And what does she do? She straightens her body and praises God. Her first act of freedom is worship.

But Jesus does more than heal; he restores her identity. He calls her “a daughter of Abraham.” This is remarkable language. Scripture often speaks of “sons of Abraham,” but rarely of daughters. In naming her this way, Jesus not only cures her body but affirms her covenant belonging. She is no longer defined by her ailment. She is a covenant heir. She belongs.

And again, her story mirrors ours. For how many of us long to hear those words? You belong. You are part of the family. You are not defined by your sin or your suffering or your difference. You are a child of God’s promise. We who are bent down by life are restored, renamed, re-belonged in Christ.

For the church today, this means our call is not only to tend wounds where we can, but to affirm belonging for those who have been excluded. Liberation is not complete until community is restored.

Of course, the story doesn’t end with her praise. The synagogue leader protests, claiming that healing is work, and work does not belong on the Sabbath. Before we cast him as a villain, we should admit: he is trying to be faithful. The Torah is clear about Sabbath rest, and leaders of his day debated what counted as work. His concern is rooted in Scripture.

But Jesus responds with compassion and clarity. Using a common rabbinic method, he argues from the lesser to the greater: if you would untie an ox or donkey and lead it to water on the Sabbath, surely you may set free a daughter of Abraham.

Jesus reframes Sabbath not as restriction but as liberation. The Sabbath is the perfect day to release someone from bondage, because Sabbath itself is a sign of God’s liberating grace: rest for the weary, justice for the oppressed, freedom for the enslaved. Healing on the Sabbath is not a violation—it is its fulfillment.

Luke concludes with a beautiful picture: the woman praises God, and the crowd rejoices. Her healing ripples outward. It is not just her story—it becomes the community's story. When one person is lifted up, the whole community is blessed. When one bent-over back is straightened, the entire body of Christ stands taller.

And this, too, is true of us. When Christ restores one of us, we are all strengthened. When Christ lifts up those bent low, the whole church rises. We do not heal or rejoice alone—we do so together.

Too often we imagine freedom as an individual experience. But Luke reminds us: liberation is communal. Joy multiplies when the most marginalized are set free.

So, if we linger in this woman's story, we find ourselves in it. We, too, walk bent over. Some by chronic illness. Some by injustice. Some by grief, depression, or trauma. Some by sin we cannot shake or fear we cannot name. And to all of us, this story proclaims: Jesus sees you. Jesus calls you. Jesus names you beloved. His work is not only to heal bodies but to free spirits, restore dignity, and bring us fully into community.

As Lutherans, we know grace is central. God's love is not earned but given. This story drips with grace: Jesus acts unmasked, freely, compassionately. And grace calls us outward. Christian freedom means we are freed from sin and death and freed for our neighbour.

The woman's healing was not only for her—it was for the whole community. Likewise, our restoration is bound up with one another. Where people are bent low for whatever reason, the church is called to stand with them, advocate for them, and proclaim God's freeing word. Sabbath, then, is not only about personal rest but about collective liberation: rest for the earth, healing for the oppressed. Sabbath is not escape—it is solidarity.

The story ends with the synagogue leader silenced and the crowd rejoicing. The woman's praise becomes contagious. Her straightened spine is itself a testimony. Notice: she speaks no words after her healing, yet her life tells the story. Her posture, her praise, her very being are enough.

And so it is with us. Many of us carry silent testimonies. We come to worship bearing scars, bent spines, broken hearts—but also unbreakable faith. When we make space to honour one another's stories, our whole community is strengthened.

The woman who had gotten used to looking sideways finally stood tall. She praised God, and the community rejoiced.

And this is the gospel: Jesus sees us. Jesus calls us. Jesus frees us. Jesus restores us. He redefines Sabbath as liberation. He names us daughters and sons of Abraham.

So may we be a church that sees the bent-over ones—including ourselves. May we see the ones who have slipped away because they did not feel seen or heard. May we receive healing and freedom from Jesus. May we join Jesus in setting people free. May we rejoice in every act of liberation. And may we, like that woman, stand tall in the grace of God and praise with our whole lives. Amen.