

## **Sermon for Sunday August 24, 2025**

**Luke 13:10-17**

**“You Are Set Free”**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

My sermon this morning is heavily influenced by the thoughts of my friend and colleague, Deacon Michelle Collins of the MNO Synod.

What is it like to feel bent over and unable to stand up straight? Some of us have experienced spending a few hours in the garden or doing a task that requires us to bend over and then groaning as we stretch back into a standing position. Others of us are familiar with the impact and effect of age as we realize that our joints and muscles aren't working the way they used to. Others just learn to live with the bodies that they have, which may not fit the expected norm in one way or another. But more significantly, I would imagine that all of us know the limitations of perspectives, feelings, or experiences that restrict us from leaning into our full selves.

Standing up straight is just as much a matter of confidence in your identity as it is a matter of stature and stability. Throughout much of my life, I walked a little bit hunched over, my face pointed to the ground. I was shy. I had braces. I didn't like the way I looked. I didn't want people to look at me. I didn't like looking into people's faces. That changed a little bit during my time in air cadets. I excelled in that program, gaining confidence in myself and in my abilities. But that really only showed when the uniform was on. It was like I was a different person then.

Mostly, I was bent over, in big sweaters, with my arms across my body. I had no confidence in my identity. And when I look back on those years, knowing who I am now, it makes complete sense. I was self-conscious about my body, knowing deep inside that it didn't look or feel the way it was supposed to. Hindsight is 20/20, but it doesn't change that I spent decades looking down at my feet as I went through the world.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath and notices a woman who has been bent over for many years. She was unable to stand up straight. Most scholars suspect this woman was suffering from a physical ailment that was affecting her spine. Maybe it was scoliosis, or arthritis. But what if it was more spiritual than physical? What if the weight of her life was so heavy that it

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caused her to look down at her feet as she moved through her life? After years of looking down, your shoulders and your back are likely to start hunching over. In the time of Luke’s gospel, this woman would have received a barrage of messages about her lack of self-worth. And whether these messages were direct or indirect, they would have informed her identity – a person of low worth, undeserving of respect, and someone to be ignored.

Our virtual and physical spaces are filled with people who cannot stand up straight for a variety of reasons. Some are bent over from physical disease and disorder. Some are bent over from trauma they do not know how to process. Some are bent over from prejudice and bias against various aspects of their identity. Some are bent over from their age and what the common opinion is about what value they bring to society. Some are bent over from generations of internalized shame. Our world is full of people who are bent over and unable to stand up straight.

And Jesus sees these people. Jesus sees the woman in the synagogue, and Jesus sees you and me. Jesus’ first word to the woman is a word of freedom and validation. “Woman,” Jesus says, “you are set free from your ailment.” Jesus extends a word of invitation and freedom without hesitation. He doesn’t confirm her faith. He doesn’t ask her all sorts of theological questions. He doesn’t even demand that she becomes one of his followers. Jesus healed this woman because he saw her pain and wanted to give her relief, and he demanded nothing in return. For Jesus, this was not a quid pro quo situation. He sees the woman, validates her existence, gives her the freedom to live her life with confidence, and brings her into full inclusion into God’s covenant community.

While the woman is the main focus of today’s reading, there is a secondary story of healing, of being set free, but this character’s ailment isn’t as obvious as the stooped over woman. The religious man in our Gospel reading isn’t too happy with Jesus healing the woman. Not because he has a problem with her being healed, but that Jesus did so on the Sabbath, a day where people are to be resting and worshipping God.

The day of Sabbath is meant to be a day of rest, and the religious law at the time stated that no work was to be done on this day. This is because on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, after God created the universe, calling it good, God rested and created the Sabbath.

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Therefore, religious law observes this day of rest as a holy day, where your only task is to give thanks to God for creating the universe. The religious leader objects to what Jesus is saying and doing because it goes against the rules – specifically the commitment to rest on the sabbath. He’s not as upset that Jesus healed the woman as that he did it on the sabbath.

But Jesus argues back and asks how the woman is to rest if she is hunched over the way she is? In fact, she won’t be able to rest because of what it is that is keeping her hunched over. We cannot say we value a day of rest when a person in our gathering is being excluded from that rest. We cannot say we value rest when those who are bound by disease, prejudice, oppression, inequality or our ignorance are excluded from experiencing rest. We cannot say we value rest when some among us are excluded from experiencing that rest because of something that is limiting their wholeness.

God created the universe and called it good, and then God rested. The day of rest is meant to be holy but are we fully deserving of that kind of a Sabbath? Is the world fully and truly good? Or do we have more work to do? Our communities are filled with people bent over from a spirit that is crippling them. Our systems are bent over from attitudes and beliefs that are crippling us. Jesus desires and proclaims healing and restoration for both. We who profess a commitment to rest are both those in need of healing, and those who are called to participate in making that rest possible – rest for children and youth burdened by limiting expectations and assumptions; rest for marginalized communities exhausted by the burden of systemic injustice and generational trauma; rest for housing and food insecure neighbours exhausted by the burden of finding the very basic necessities for life; rest for those exhausted by the burden of labels, prejudice, hatred, and exclusion; rest for those exhausted from working for justice, reconciliation, and equality for the most vulnerable; rest for you and me, exhausted by the burden of grief, loneliness, shame, fear, and insecurity.

Jesus saw the woman bent over from the burdens of disease and daily life. Jesus saw the religious man bent over from the burden of trying to follow the law of the Sabbath. Jesus sees each and every one of us bent over from the burden of whatever it is we are carrying today. Jesus sees us, reaches out to us in love, and says to us, “You are set free.” Through the waters of baptism, we are washed and

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made clean. We are set free from the ailment of sin. Through the bread and wine of communion we are fed, nourished, and forgiven. We are set free and included in God’s promise of eternal life.

Whatever it is that’s keeping you bent over today, you are seen and loved by the One who knows your name and who stays by your side through the darkness of sin and death. You are seen and loved by the one who defeated the power of death so that you might eternally hear the words, “You are set free.”

Amen.