

*Luke 13:10-17. Jesus Heals a Bent-Over Woman.*

She does not ask to be healed.

Did you notice?

This woman in our Lesson from Luke, bent over by a “crippling” spirit, does not reach out in desperation, as so many others do: clinging to a garment or clamoring through a roof or crying out in anguish for help from this traveling preacher turned healer of body and soul.

She just “appears” as Jesus teaches among the gathered community. And he calls her over. And he tells her to be well. And he touches her head to make it so. Those of us in the world of Reiki might even say he has *balanced her chakras*.

We assume she is grateful. She praises God, and the crowd does, too. But we have no idea whether or not she shows up this day specifically seeking a healing. Or if she is somewhat surprised by her newly straightened back. Or how she handles her new lease on life once the Sabbath day is over.

We do not even really know what her “ailment” actually is. A “spirit” has “crippled” her, the Lesson says. For eighteen years. And immediately we think arthritis or scoliosis or some other such debilitating disease of old age. But the Greek simply says she has had a “spirit of weakness” all this time. And since the average life span for a first century woman of Judea is roughly 40 years, and since 80 percent of the population survives at a mere subsistence level, and since the Roman occupation has turned a land of promise and plenty for all into a land of increasing plenty for the “haves” and a broken promise for the “have nots,” we should assume that her weakness is not the typical shifting of posture that comes with advancing years.

We should assume instead that she is just plain broken down by the weight of the world that has quite literally settled upon her shoulders, at least half of her life, and maybe more. She is just trying to make it through. And aren't we all?

We know something about the weight of the world on our shoulders, don't we, still dragging through a pandemic, with a hope of Back to School normalcy, but a potential new variant outbreak always on the horizon, while the worst teacher shortage in history unfolds before our eyes. We know something about the weight of the world on our shoulders, with uneven inflation wreaking havoc on our families' budgets and yet another threat to a nuclear power plant spiraling in Ukraine. We know something about the weight of the world on our shoulders, as election deniers march toward power in key battleground states and our own county government refuses even modest efforts to denounce racism and white supremacy.

As I lamented to my own parents in a phone call last week, it feels like I have spent my whole life working to make the world a better place, but it is only getting worse.

Talk about a spirit of weakness! The weight of the world on our shoulders is enough to make every one of us slump into our binge-watching sofas and never come out. Or slink into these pews, like the woman in our Lesson, dragging ourselves to our covenant community on this Sabbath day, seeking some sort of relief for our pains - and perhaps even more for our pride. Like the woman in our Lesson, we do expect *something* healing to happen when we show up on a Sunday morning.

Our Christian Sunday “Lord’s Day,” is to be sure a so-called “mini-Easter” in which we proclaim the contemporary healing power of the God who resurrected Jesus so very long ago, just as the “Sabbath” for the first century Jew serves as a “mini-Passover” in which the covenant community proclaims the liberating, healing, delivering-from-bondage God of the Exodus. The Holy One of our ancestors, we say on this day, will not ever stop rescuing the bent over, downtrodden, weighed down woman or man from whatever bondage is holding us captive. At least that is how it is supposed to be. In theory.

In practice, then as well as now, so many of us in these pulpits and in these pews are actually quite fearful - or even downright dismissive - of the healing, liberating, resurrecting power of God *in the present tense*. We are instead rather fond of worshipping that God as an icon of the past. With the liberating healing of resurrection already complete. Decently and in order. And our souls safely saved for the great beyond. Without all that need to create all that ruckus.

And all those other people who maybe think they have a right to expect a little bit more healing liberating resurrecting right now than we do, well, they can just wait their turn. And be patient. And maybe come back another day of the week. Or year. Or decade. Or generation. When the rest of us get good and ready. Because, really, it is rather irreverent to make such a stir on the Sabbath.

Of course Jesus will have none of that decent and orderly business, at least when it stands in the way of a good old fashioned resurrection of the spirit. You may not expect to be raised up in this moment, Jesus says, to the woman and to us, but *there’s space in you where time’s arrow goes out and out*, as the poet says, and I want to heal that space in you. (Which *is widely known as the grace of God.*)

Stand up for yourself, Jesus is saying, to this woman and to us, as the healing, liberating, resurrecting power of God *works through you* to strengthen the backbone of the entire congregation, including the pastor, even when it feels futile, to *stand up* for justice and peace and freedom and equality in the church *and* in the world, so that nobody ever need slouch their way through a pseudo-Sabbath ever again!

Stand up for yourself, Jesus is saying, to this woman and to us, which is why we raise a ruckus in advocating categorical divestment from fossil fuels *now* and not just when our policy finally gets around to it. Stand up for yourself, Jesus is saying, to this woman and to us, which is why we raise a ruckus to end to gun violence *now* and not just when the rest of the country finally gets around to it. Stand up for yourself, Jesus is saying, to this woman and to us, which is why we raise a ruckus in calling out racism in government *now* and just not when the political class finally gets around to it.

We must *be* the change we wish to see in the world, in the words of the great Mahatma Gandhi, *now*, and we must form ourselves into the Beloved Community God has already created us to be *now*, standing firm, with a strengthened backbone, for God's liberating vision of wholeness, *now*, which has been our Sabbath witness all along.

The good news is God has been preparing us for this healing hope in the whole world from the beginning of time through the end. Long before this moment in our Lesson, the Spirit of the healing, liberating, resurrecting, and *Living* God already stood firm in our souls, just waiting for the perfect chance to strengthen together our collective backbone. Not asking our permission. Not even really in response to our cry. But just because we are slouching into our pews on a Sunday Sabbath in need of a resurrection. And we get it.

As we prepare to go Back to School, three years in to this global pandemic, as we labor in our careers, as we tend our kids, as we hammer on the Habitat house, as we rally at the County Commission, the honest-to-goodness truth is that we really are ready to raise a righteous ruckus, on behalf of the healing liberating resurrecting God who is making *us* well on this Sabbath Sunday, and wants to do the same for the world.

So *stand up*, Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church, for the right of all God's children to live in freedom. *Stand up*, Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church for the liberating love of the Living God that will not every let any one of us go. *Stand up*, Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church, for the good news that no one ever need slouch again.

Including, and most especially, ourselves.

Let the church say, Amen!