

Becoming Unbent: Sermon on Luke 13:10-17

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Gospel: [St. Luke 13:10-17](#)

Luke 13:10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 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. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 but the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." 15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" 17 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. (NRSV)

Bent and Broken

I had returned to America from Turkey and Iraq. It had been 5 years since I had last seen my mother. My mother's 97 years weighed upon her shoulders like a crushing weight bearing down upon her small, and now frail looking body and back. Deterioration of the spine, the result of years of a degenerative disease, had taken its toll and it left her bent but not broken. She met me with a smile. Her breath was drawn, less with casual ease, and more with intense labor. Little did I know this was the last week of her life. Her body was taught, not limp, gripped with pain, bent in agony.

Without complaint, she labored as she opened the door to her tiny apartment. I hugged her. Her breath was shallow. Her arms were weak. I knew she had taken her medication to ease her pain. It dulled her once bright eyes to a different state of glaze, not with pain, but into that gentle oblivion that will soon have her sleeping later that morning. Doctors could not cure what bent her to the point of breaking.

I think of my mother as I read this text for today. I know she is in the presence of Jesus since her death ten years ago. Like our story in the Gospel of Luke this morning she had stepped toward Jesus and he has touched her. I imagine her straight, unbent, and smiling again.

C. S. Lewis wrote a science fiction trilogy titled *Perelandra*. In the first book, titled *Out of the Silent Planet* the chief character named Dr. Ranson is kidnapped and taken to a Mars-like planet where humans are looked upon as bent creatures as they have succumbed to temptation.

Bound and Set Free

In Luke's telling of his story he describes a woman as bent "bent " but also "bound." In Aramaic, the language Jesus, he spoke to this woman he said "isr" which is a kind of pun. It means "bent" but it also means "tempted." Thus we have a literal meaning and a psychological meaning to this one word.

She has been bent for 18 years. Jesus never told a one-dimensional story. The number 18 is not to be ignored here. The number 18 is a product of three numbers: 6, 6, 6. This is symbolic of evil. Jesus uses this number on purpose to hint at the deeper dimension of the story. Jesus is alluding to the fact that she was bent due to an evil spirit that had crippled her.

If we read this story on a psychological level we see that she has fallen to temptation. Jesus uses wordplay in his native language to refer to "temptation" that cripples us when we fall to such things as addiction to drugs, alcohol, pornography, violence that all begin in matters of the heart. All sin begins in the heart. Sin becomes physical as an outward expression of an inward psychological condition. C.S. Lewis says we go to hell not in one giant leap but in a 1000 tiny steps.

It is not just physical temptation that bends us and ties us into knots. It is the deeper psychological temptations that are worse like the spirits of personal piety, arrogance, the despising of others such as we see in the man from the Synagogue who enters the story. It is the unseen spirits of sin such as the weight of pride that bends us out of shape. The man from the synagogue wanted God's laws to serve him rather than for him to serve God. So many of us are weighed down and bent by the hidden demons of seeking the "right doctrine" or striving for "clean living" Are we also victims of these kinds of temptation? Do we need to be freed and loosed by Jesus?

Notice the woman does not come to Jesus to seek healing? He seeks her out and calls her over. Jesus asks us to take the first step. Then He sets her free in the same way he

will set us free if we take the first step to Him. In Jesus, God in the form of Jesus Christ has taken on our 'bentness' whether physical or psychological. Christ Jesus, took on the full weight of our Sin and experiences our "bent-ness" on the cross for us. And God renders its power null and void, even when we are desperately holding on to our petty temptations. Even though the ruler of the Synagogue is shamed by Jesus for the moment, did he recognize that the woman's liberation on the Sabbath was his liberation as well?

The Liberating Day

All of this brings us back to the question of what the Sabbath day is for? We have the Sabbath by God's command, as a day of rest. St. Augustine prayed, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord." Perhaps it is out of longing for God that we have the Sabbath. As a child, My Dutch took literally the law of the Sabbath. Our neighbors would not milk their cows on Sunday. Their children could not go outside and play, even my Lutheran father would rest on the Sabbath and take an afternoon nap only on Sunday. God does something for us on the Sabbath. God meets us and transforms us on the Sabbath. God unties us, God sets us free.

But, such severity in serving the law of the Sabbath does not serve God.

In joy we gather and sing with other Christians also once bound, still bound, in need of being loosed. We drink from the sweet cup of God's liberating presence. We speak of our commitment to the world and by practicing His love. By serving others we begin to feel the weight bending our lives. We rejoice at the Eucharistic table as we experience the Living Bread and Wine coming into us bodily, giving us a taste of the feast of freedom that is Present. We are blessed as we are set loose on the world, where the liberation we have experienced becomes the liberation we practice.

We taste, we see, we are touched and transformed by the boundless love and grace of God. The result is wholeness that God has promised to all creation in the fullness of time.

What joy is found in this experience? We are now free for one more thing: honesty. We can be honest about how we are bent and broken. We can be honest about the bondage that enslaves us. We no longer have to hide. We are free to welcome the Christ who comes, sees us, like the woman, weighed down, and bids us come and be made whole.

For my mother in heaven, for the ruler of the synagogue, for me, and for you my brothers and sisters, Lord Jesus, touch us and set us free from bondage and temptation. Straighten our souls. Lord Jesus come quickly.