

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OUGHT SHE NOT BE FREED?

Luke 13:10-17

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Paul Jaster

10Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11And 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. 12When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14But 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." 15But 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? 16And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" 17When 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Tied

Step 1: Initial diagnosis (External Problem) : Crippled

This crippled woman may make us think of those few we know who are curved over like the letter “C”. But, as Luther noted, many humans tend to curve in upon themselves. Rather than standing tall as Christ’s redeemed and praising God by trusting in Christ’s saving work, we focus on our own navels and concern ourselves with belly needs. The guardians of God’s commanding word in this story are also curved in upon themselves and more concerned with Torah observance and the care of their possessions than with the prompt and wondrous healing of this ailing and constricted woman. But stiff frowns and turned-up noses are a twisted posture, too. Being curved in on oneself is crippling of persons, communities, and economies.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Bound*

Such curved-in people are bound, not only by an ailing body, but also by a Satanic spirit employing God’s own good and holy law full of its “oughts” and “ought nots”. The smug and sanctimonious types see the latter as being just fine and peachy; they think being bound to God’s commanding word is good. But, it’s not. Not when sin allows Satan, the Accuser, to use God’s own law as a power against us. Jesus quickly exposes the leading men of the synagogue as twisted “hypocrites” who are spiritually lacking as well and more considerate and sensitive towards their own animals than towards this ailing woman. They fall short of the very law they ardently defend. Our illnesses of spirit put us in a precarious position. We are bound to God’s law like a donkey to its manger. We need it. We feed off of it. We cannot escape it. We are tethered to it. And yet it is a rope around our neck. A noose. And never can we live by it alone. A diet of God’s commanding word by itself is not enough-any more than the dry feed in a feedbox is enough without the freedom to move to where there is life-giving water. Without that water we choke and croak.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Grievously*

Condemned

The leader of the synagogue criticizes Jesus for doing this healing on the Sabbath. And ultimately Jesus will be condemned and put to death as a deterrent by God's law for doing lawless acts like these. That's what happens to serious law breakers. They are condemned to death. Certainly Jesus could have waited until the Sabbath was over. The woman's ailment is not life-threatening. She had coped with it for 18 years. Would a few more hours matter? What is life-threatening is to violate God's will! On this everyone agrees: both Jesus and his opponents. But what is the ultimate will of God? Is it the law or something else? Is there another word from God perhaps? And who expresses it?

PROGNOSIS: Loosed

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Cured

Jesus knows darn well the risk he is taking. He is on his way to Jerusalem after all, driven by the divine necessity of his suffering and death. This compassionate act and others like it will cost him his own life. Yet, he does not hesitate at all. He sees the woman in her distress, calls to her, lays his hands on her and heals her. The cross-bound mission of the Savior is the same as the liberating mission of Sabbath: "to proclaim release to captives" and "to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18, cf. Deut. 5:15). There is a reason Jesus so intentionally healed on the Sabbath even when it was elective. For next to the cross itself, there was no better way to demonstrate God's ultimate intentions: the healing and freeing of those who cannot heal and free themselves. And why make this daughter of Abraham (a daughter of the promise) wait a single second longer: "Ought not she be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath day?" This is not the "ought" of the law; not another command or demand that tethers her. This is the "ought" of God's promises fulfilled in Christ. The healing that must happen when a crucified and risen

Christ intervenes in our lives by his own loving act and not our own. For Jesus is the crucified and risen Lord, who speaks God's last and final word: a word of liberating redemption, not crippling condemnation.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Loosed*

The woman is loosed and freed from the threefold powers that oppress her: her crippled body, a crippling spirit, and the crippling constraints of God's own law. This is twice the healing: Jesus uses the rich and loaded language of "binding and loosing" (the very terminology the rabbis used when applying God law or not to a particular situation, or when the ancients spoke of the power held over someone by a sorcerer, spirit, or god). Seen, called, touched, and possessed by Christ, who is the true Lord, the crippled woman is the beneficiary of the oath God swore to Abraham, which is "to rescue us from the hands of our enemies so that we might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days" (as Mary says so magnificently in Luke 1:73). Jesus does far more than just a physical healing. He frees us from confining tyrannies of every kind, including pious ones imposed by the obstreperous watchdogs of orthodoxy, who, failing to see God's new day in Christ, bark up the wrong tree and unevangelically and anachronistically turn God's former word to ancient people into divine necessities that are burdensome, hurtful, and disabling to ostracized and wounded men and women.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Rejoicing*

And immediately the woman "stood up straight and began praising God" and "the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things the Lord Jesus was doing." The opposite of curving in upon ourselves like the letter "C" is the upward and outward "Wow!" of worship that moves up and out in endless waves like a whole bunch of letters "W". Straightening up and praising God involves the threefold "Wow!" that immediately and spontaneously bursts forth from Christians as they are freed from the burdens

of their crippling past: that is, the “Wow!” of Worship, Outreach and Witness. This is the “Wow!” that Mary so magnificently sings in her Magnificat when the hand of the Lord touched her. And that the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar expresses when Jesus unties the rope and leads her to living waters. This is the posture of Christian people each and every Sabbath day...and all six work days in-between.