

**Message: “Freedom”, presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 07-03-2016
at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.**

Luke 13: 10 – 18

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues,¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all.¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

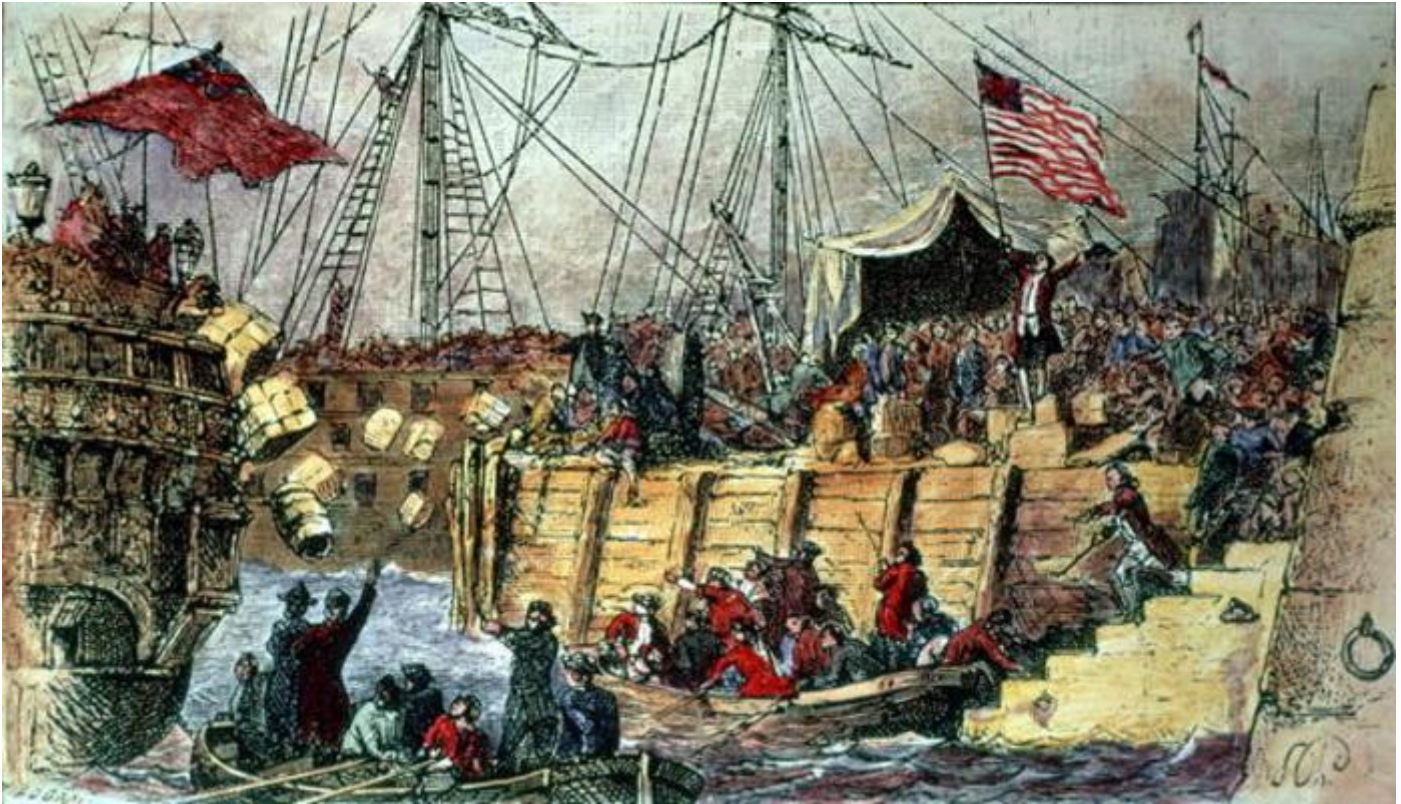
¹⁵The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

¹⁸Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”

A word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

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On the night of December 16th 1773 a small group of men banded together, boarded three merchant ships in Boston Harbor and dumped 342 chests of tea into the bay.

This group of men, *who called themselves the Sons of Liberty*, took this action because of the taxing policies of the English Government. But, only when we look at this act in Boston Harbor **against** the backdrop of the big picture, the revolutionary war, will we see its true significance.

The 'Boston Tea Party' was not just an isolated incident; it was one of the first acts of what became known as the American War of Independence.

We also need to see the story in today's Gospel in the same light. In the light of the bigger picture. What is this Gospel story telling us? What is the Big Picture behind this story?

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If we look at the small picture, we see an act of love and grace in which Jesus healed a woman who had suffered for eighteen years from some form of curvature of the spine.

In itself this pretty spectacular. But Luke is inviting us to also see this event in terms of the big picture. It's not just an isolated act of healing; it is one of many victories in Jesus' war of liberation against the forces of evil. Jesus invites us to see this woman's illness against the backdrop of a larger picture. The picture of Satan's work of binding the human race. He invites us to see the healing of this woman as a sign of how the Kingdom of God works. A work to transform the world. A work to set people free from bondage.

Let's look at the bigger picture: While Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, He would be sitting at the front sharing a message. And close beside him would be the ruler of the synagogue. The elder who was responsible for ensuring that the teaching was sound and orthodox. As Jesus is teaching, this woman appears; we can assume that this is a small community and that the woman is known to the people in the village. They would know that she has struggled with this ailment for eighteen years.

Luke, who was a physician, describes her symptoms for us in some detail. Yet he also indicates a deeper cause; Luke states she was a woman with a spirit that had crippled her

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([Luke 13:11](#)). Jesus stops in the middle of his message and calls her to the front. He speaks words of freedom to her, lays his hands on her, and immediately, for the first time in eighteen years, she is able to straighten up and look straight into another person’s face.

The ruler of the synagogue immediately challenges Jesus.

The elder firmly states “There are six days that you can heal people!! Come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath!

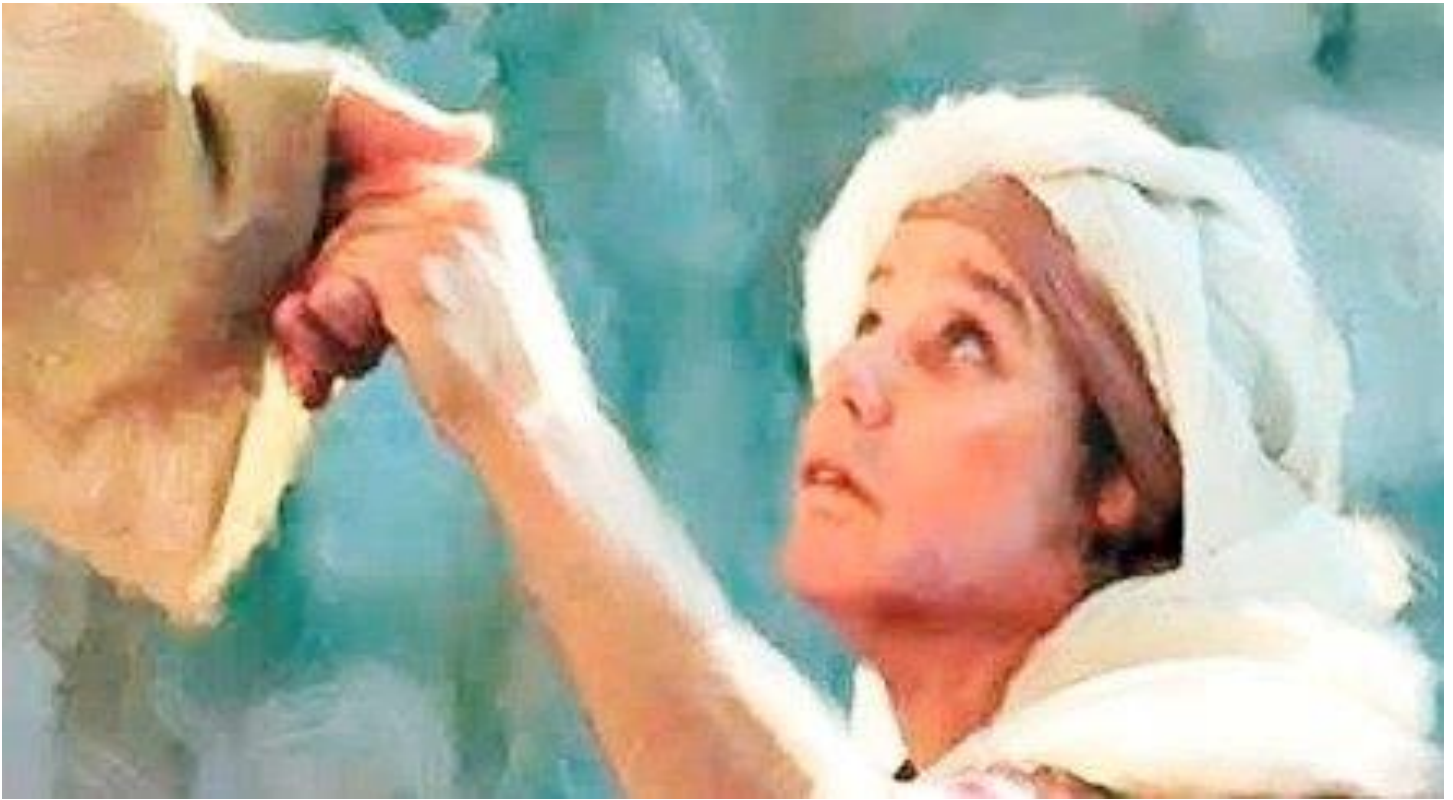
Jesus recognizes the ruler’s words - They’re from [Deuteronomy 5:13-14](#), which states “For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work -- you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey”.

So in his reply to the ruler of the synagogue, Jesus points out that the text does not just forbid work by humans; Oxen and donkeys are also forbidden to work on the Sabbath!

However, there is not a man in the synagogue who would think twice about setting his ox or his donkey free on the Sabbath so that they could go and get a drink! So why then should he, Jesus, not set this woman free from Satan’s bondage?

That is the close up view. Now let us step back and look at the big picture.

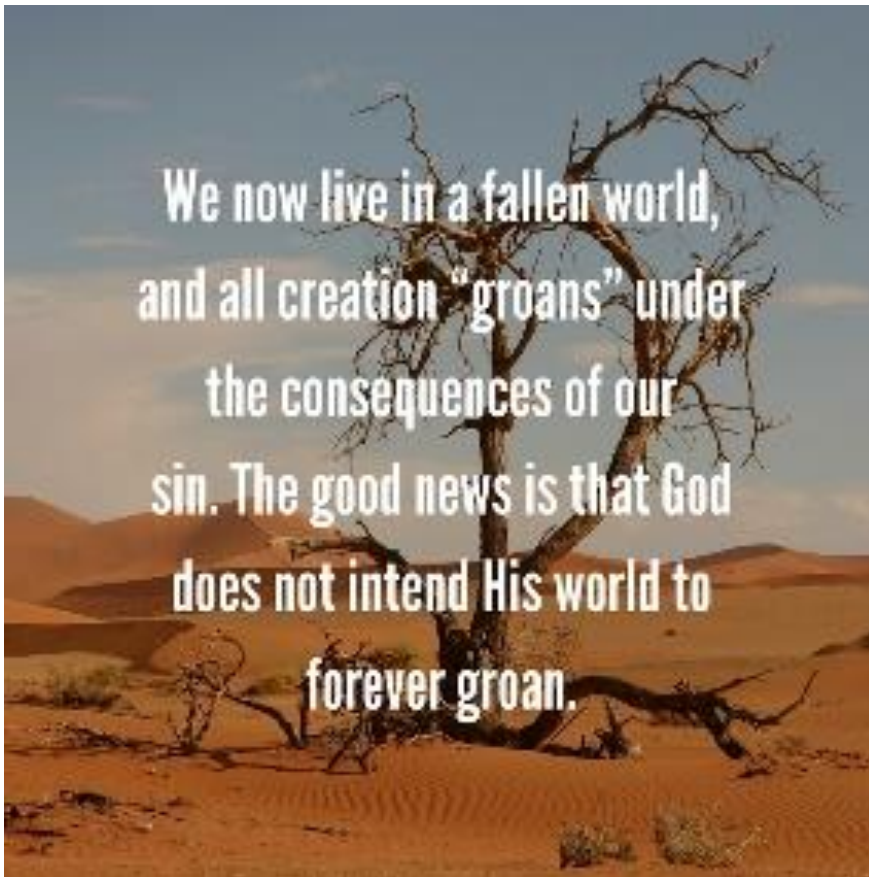
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This story does not read like other stories in the gospels in which Jesus sets people free from the power of evil spirits. Jesus does not speak a word of rebuke to an evil spirit in this passage. There is no sign that the evil spirit convulsed the woman before coming out.

And, most telling of all, Jesus lays hands on this woman, which he never does in stories of deliverance from demons. So now, we take a closer look at these details. I believe that Luke is not telling us that this illness is specifically caused by Evil spirits. Rather, I am convinced he is inviting us to see that illness in general is one of the signs of a fallen world and of Satan's or evil's activity in this fallen world.

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God's original plan for creation did not include disease. It did not include illness. But illness is certainly one of the ways that Evil binds the human race. Of course there are many others like war, violence, compulsive habits, fears, injustice, oppression and on and on.

It is as if Jesus is saying, “You see this woman? You see how she is bound by this illness? This is what happens in a fallen world. This is what the power of evil does to human beings -- it binds, it cripples, and it seeks to destroy. Our war is not against flesh and blood but against forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

But of course there is another part of that big picture that God wants us to see: the big picture concerning Jesus' work.

Let's go back to the illustration of the Boston Tea Party in 1773. Its true significance was not just as an isolated event, but one of many acts of the revolutionary war. It was part of many acts which finally led to the founding of the United States of America.

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And in much the same way, the story of the healing of this woman is not just about her life. Rather, it is part of the story of how the kingdom of God triumphs over the power of evil. That is why Jesus adds this explanation at the end of this story, in verses 18-21:

Jesus said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches”. Jesus saw the kingdom of God working in a gradual way to transform the world.



In this gradual process, every healing is evidence that the power of evil is being broken as it comes face to face with the power of the Son of God.

Now, how does this story apply to our lives today? This woman was bound by a disease. This woman was obviously in bondage. But there are other forms of bondage, which are not so obvious.

What binds you? What binds me?

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What prevents us from standing up straightin a spiritual sense? What is holding us back from being transformed into the image of Christ? What is holding us back from being able to enjoy life fully as God has planned it? And this is a fairly common form of Spiritual 'curvature of the spine', And for some, it has lingered for far more than eighteen years.

And if that is you, then I know and in your spirit you know that Jesus is saying it is time to be set free.

Are you ready to be free? As surely as God's power was able to set this woman free, so his power can set you free.

It might not happen in an instant, as it did with this woman. It may be more like a seed growing into a tree. And, it may not happen in a way that you recognize. Whether it happens gradually or suddenly, **it can happen for you.**

Beloved... Jesus is inviting you to have faith in him. To trust that he truly loves you and wants to free you from all bondage - are you ready to let him?

Let us pray... Amen!