

# Free to see, free to act

Loving Creator, you search us and know us: may we rely on you in strength and rest on you in weakness, now and all our days; in Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior. Amen.

*Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England*

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THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 16C)

Hebrews 12:18-29, Psalm 103:1-8, Luke 13:10-17

August 21, 2016

**ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY**

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 13:10-17

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 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. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 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." 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? And 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?" 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.

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There is a spirit in our illness.  
And I'm not speaking against  
science or blaming the victim.

I mean: when we are sick or  
injured, our whole selves  
experience the pain, know the  
disability.

We may have some sense of  
complicity or bear the impact of an  
abuse from outside of ourselves. We  
may ruminate about how we used  
or misused our health when we had

it – things done and left undone, as  
the confession sometimes says it.

And it can be crippling – as  
we heard in this gospel reading.

And the soul-illness or injury  
can undermine us every bit as much  
as the physical symptoms we are  
dealing with.

One of the key phrases in this  
gospel reading is in the third  
sentence – in the third line in the  
reading printed in your service

leaflets – just three words: ...Jesus saw her....

Part of the spirit of illness or injury is having difficulty seeing ourselves... we lose track of who we are, of our wholeness, our being. We become the ailment or injury....

Jesus saw her.

And this is the point, the actual point, at which the rules and restrictions of the Sabbath came to have no hold on Jesus.

Once he saw her, there was nothing else he could do and no other time to do it. Then and there he was compelled to say what he did say: “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.”

Which is to say: you are set free from seeing yourself, from imagining yourself as a limited and painful aspect of your physical existence in the world.

You are free from what is crippling your humanity.

Some may recall that last week, in a passage from Luke’s gospel just prior to what we have heard today, Jesus is stressed and anxious. He is having a hard time getting done what he feels he needs to do, to say what must be said to the people of earth about their lives and the life of the world.

I said: “Jesus is not trying to show us who he is, he is trying to show us who we are, to awaken us to a larger reality and possibility for ourselves and for all of humanity and our living in the created

environment of the world.”

Also, “Jesus is hoping is that people will wake up, will see that he is showing a God who is very near, who is as close as our breath, who is not far off but who is engaged in every aspect of our lives and all of life... and that God’s view of us and everything is literally essential to each person and to all life, to the whole created order.”

Between what we read of Jesus in his agitated state and what we read today about healing on the Sabbath, there is a bit more teaching, more challenging the conventional wisdom, typical of Jesus, of the mind of Christ (which is a gift to each of us).

But the action that Jesus comes to is this one: speaking to the underlying crippling that has sidelined this woman for eighteen years.

Jesus saw her.

Jesus sees us.

Who do we see?

How do we see ourselves?

My sense is there is always more to see – in the people around us and in ourselves – together with all the illnesses and ailments that beset us in our human lives – and those injuries of all sorts are often painful tests. It is easy to see how they can undermine us, pull the rug out from under us, restrict our experience of living, leave us bent over, as was the woman Jesus saw. And we are, as we know, vulnerable

to death, to the end that we all face at some point or another.

But it begins with seeing.

Seeing ourselves as we are in God's eyes.

Seeing others – friends and family as well as acquaintances, strangers and even enemies – as God sees them. God's eyes are available to us.

Every person we encounter need not be our best friend forever. Jesus, in a sense, knew the woman in this gospel story not at all.

But he could see in her humanity that she was his sister, someone to see and touch and, in so doing, to free to stand upright.

We know from reports of Jesus bearing his cross at the time of his passion, that Jesus himself knew what it was to be bent over, to struggle beneath a literal, physical burden.

And yet, with God there is always more.

Even after the death of Jesus, there was more – the Easter reality, that sacred cycle of moving, constantly from death to life.

And yes, it makes sense to include with our personal experience and understanding of our own lives or lives of people we may know, those we don't know, the world God so loves, our community and communities beyond ourselves.

Jesus saw her.

Jesus saw the world.

How do we see the world?

Clearly it can be frightening, horrifying. There is never a week in which some fresh hell does not descend upon people who share this island home with us.

Time and again we are given both the opportunity to see and the opportunity to act as Jesus did, to both call out the profound, the foundational and encompassing health and true identity of the world and its people, and to lay hands, to take demonstrative action to free that larger, God-given identity and reality for others, for our wider world, the world around us that is the focus of God's undying love.

We can dare to see.

We can dare to act.

And, yes, our action may seem small, may seem insignificant.

And we may take our action together, as a faith community, or a community of friends and neighbors together to free someone or a group of people to stand up straight in their larger, God-given identity, to be as God sees them.

It could be leaving open a door, as we do here day by day, or welcoming some group that would seem to have nothing to with us. It may be committing some resource we have to a larger purpose, as people have been doing for the Summer Classic this coming Saturday, what that event is all about, and what we intend in

redeveloping our kitchen to serve as a community kitchen, addressing the food and economic security with which many of our neighbors live day by day, that bends them over, cripples them as this woman was crippled for many years.

Our opportunities to act may run against the grain – as Jesus’s actions clearly did.

But also, as Jesus did, we are called to rise to the larger vision, the most significant, substantive reality we see, given to us with God’s eyes, our vision finding its focus in the mind of God, the mind of the universal and risen Christ.

There is a constant and unending flow of both seeing and acting to which we can say yes; women and men bent over, ready to stand up straight, who are living life with us and among us.

Clearly Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had this gospel reading at heart when he said (as he frequently did), “The time is always right to do what is right.” Standing against those who object to the violation of a particular convention or tradition that keeps people bound up, unfree. You’ll note that the religious leaders had nothing to say about setting the woman free, only criticism of Jesus for calling her into her healing (the sort of thing that always has and continues to give “religion” a bad name).

Can we accept for ourselves and be agents of God in rising to the

fullness of life God longs for us and for all to have?

What do we see?

How will we act?



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