



Straighten Up!!! – Touchpoint for August 17, 2022

Luke 13:10-17 (NRSVUE) Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman 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 to water? ¹⁶ 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?”

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight.”

So what do we have here? A woman who has a spirit/demon that causes her a physical ailment and she is healed.

Well, since most people don't believe in demons anymore, or miracle healing, I guess I have one of two options. Tell you that you have to believe in demon possession and healing miracles, or just dismiss this passage to some ancient myth.

And since I don't want to do either of those, let's try to dig a little deeper.

So, what are demons? Those of us who grew up with the movie "The Exorcist" will have one view. Other people will have other views.

But here is one definition that I think works: A demon is anything that interferes with the Mystery's presence in your life and others ...

... any spirit or entity, whether it be religious, cultural, or economic that detours us from the Mystery in whom we all live and move and have our being.

... any spirit or entity that holds you or others back, or holds you or others down from being the one God created us all to be.

So don't tell me demons don't exist in our world. Or that I don't have any inside me and you don't have any inside you.

Heck, holding other people down so I can climb over you on the way to the top is just good business, and the only way to get ahead in this world.

“Nothing personal, of course ... It’s just business.

And by the way ... Jesus loves you.”

In other words, anything that keeps anyone from standing straight as a child of God. Anything that keeps anyone from walking tall as God’s beloved. Anything that makes anyone doubt their place in the Divine Mystery.

Anything that does that is a demon.

How long do any of us need to reflect, before we can remember those times or those voices from our past or in our present, that have made us hang our head, that have told us we are not enough, that have told us we don’t measure up?

Let’s remember a woman’s place in society in that era. Where there were sayings like this one: “It is better to teach a daughter to be a prostitute than to teach her the Torah.” And this one: “Wives, be subject to your husbands.”

These were the accepted norms 2000 years ago! Can you believe it?

If you can’t relate to this woman who for 18 years has been weighed down by a spirit that made her feel pushed down, inferior, less than others... I wish I had your life.

How long do any of us need to reflect, before we can remember those times or those voices from our past or in our present, that have made us hang our head, that have told us we are not enough, that have told us we don’t measure up?

That is what this passage is all about, isn’t it? Standing tall. Standing straight. Head up, not down. Able to look people in the eye as an equal.

And I’m not talking about this insane bravado and bloviating bullying that seems to have captured our culture’s imagination, where I can only stand up straight if I can put you down.

No, this passage is about the voice that speaks to you and then has you saying “Yes” to yourself, to others, and to all of creation.

And so this passage isn't primarily about a physical ailment. I know people who are hunched over from physical ailments and the burdens of life who stand up straighter than I ever will. I've met people in wheelchairs who stand taller than I can ever dream of.

Jacob wrestles with God in the Old Testament and comes away walking with a limp. But with a new name – Israel. And with a new purpose – standing tall.

Look, we all walk with limps. We all have scars. That's what life does to us. Heck, the risen Christ still has scars and wounds. And he's resurrected, for Christ’s sake... or maybe it’s for our sake... Never mind.

No, this passage is about standing up straight. Knowing who you are in the eyes of the Divine. This is about casting out those spirits in our lives that tell us we don't measure up, we aren't enough. Those spirits that hold us down.

This is about casting out those spirits in our culture, that say to others, “You don’t measure up, you are not enough.” Those spirits that make others walk with heads down, slumped over, in fear.

This passage is about the word from Jesus that tells us we are free to “*Stand up straight.*”

“Stand up straight, people. You are a beloved child of God.”

And those who value their own ox, and those who value their own ass more than you...

They do not get to determine your value.

“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 bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?”

She’s a daughter of Abraham – something far more important than your ox and your ass – even if the spirit of your society doesn’t think so.

She’s a daughter of Abraham, made in the image of God at creation.

And she is set free ON the Sabbath day.

Is there something here? Why on the Sabbath? Is there something being said here about our religious laws, rules and codes that bind people, cripple people? Is she set free not only ON the Sabbath, but FROM the Sabbath? And the way it has been imposed on people? Do our religious practices hold people down, or free them up? Is this passage trying to say something to us holy religious folks, as well as those who have been crippled by societal and religious institutions?

This isn’t a demon inside of her holding her down. This is a demon in the world, its systems, its cultures, that chooses to value people on something other than being children of God.

She’s a daughter of Abraham, which is another way of saying chosen by God.

And so are you. Chosen and Beloved.

So stand up straight! This is what the Mystery wants for us – to stand up straight. This is when God can finally rest, take a Sabbath. When all are standing up straight. When all have been untied from the ropes, chains and spirits that bind them.

“Which of you having an ox or donkey doesn't untie it and lead it to drink?”

Isn't this what the Mystery is saying to us today? Stand up straight! You are free – untied to come and eat and drink of the Divine.

Here in bread and drink. Here with others who have been hunched over by the wear and tear and spirits of life.

Here is where you encounter the one Spirit who says:

“You are enough. You belong. You are beloved.

STAND UP STRAIGHT!”

Look how we identify those at the original table. The BETRAYER... the DENIER... the weak in flesh... sleepyheads... and the cowards and fearful. We see none of them standing tall, standing up straight this evening.

And how does Jesus see them? As a part of his body, his essence. *“Take and eat, this is my body,”* which you will now become.

As part of his life blood. *“Take and drink,”* for you are now my New Covenant to the world.

So stand up straight people. This is who you are.

His body and life blood in the world.

Stand up straight people. This is who you are.

Beloved, chosen, re-membered...

To the Christ who is all and in all.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face." Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.