

## **“Becoming Unbound” – Luke 13:10-17 – August 25, 2019**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

In today’s story from Luke’s gospel we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath – a common enough sight during his ministry. While he is teaching, he takes notice of and calls out to a woman bent over, probably from horrible arthritis or osteoporosis. She has been in this bent over position for the last 18 years. Can you imagine what life was like for her, stuck in that position of always looking down. Staring at the dust on the ground, aware of rocks and dirt, dirty feet and the dusty hems of cloaks. Unable to see the sky, the clouds, the stars, the birds flying above, unable to look at the faces of those around her, unable to speak with someone eye to eye – without contorting her body and craning her neck into an uncomfortable position.

She becomes very familiar with a downward view. Her sight has been narrowed to the space in front her feet and the sideways view of the world when she tried to look up and around her. She became trapped in this narrow perspective, and it defined how she saw the world and her place in it.

In recent years, beginning with a case in Hollywood of women accusing a producer of sexual misconduct – a case that is about to go to trial in New York – the #MeToo movement was born. With this movement, women are becoming empowered to find their voices and speak out against abuse they have endured, women have become encouraged to share their stories, finding solidarity with one another. But even with this glint on new light being shed on an ancient issue, many women may never feel safe to speak about what they have endured. Those in opposition to the movement still want blame the victims and others shrug their shoulders and want to accept that it’s just the way things are and, boys will always be boys. These varying perspectives on the issue of sexual abuse influence how one defines the world and their place in it.

Additionally, the issue of racial injustice is still very much a concern. Some want to believe that the relations between blacks and whites are just fine. Despite stories to the contrary, they believe that there is no racial injustice any more. Others, who are white, say they don’t have a racist bone in their bodies, what’s the issue? Words like white privilege and white fragility mean nothing to them. Yet, if that’s the case, and there is no longer racial injustice, why do white supremacy groups still exist, and why do black mothers still have to tell their young black sons that they will always be seen as a threat, a thug, or a criminal. These varying perspective on the issue of racial injustice influence how one defines the world and their place in it.

Recently in our own community, the Marathon County Board had been dealing with the issue of whether or not to set aside the month of June as Pride Month, a month to celebrate and bring forward the issues of the LGBT community. Anger and much debate on all sides of the issue emphasize that this is still very much a hot topic, not only in our community, but in many places in our country. Some want to just bury the topic, saying now that gay marriage has been legalized, there isn't an issue anymore. Yet bullying and violent acts are still committed against people in the LGBT community, and young people trying to come to terms with their sexuality may still feel rejection from their families, their friends, and their churches. These varying perspectives on the issue of human sexuality influence how one defines the world and their place in it.

Each of these issues have the ability to weigh people down in debilitating ways. How people are perceived by others can cause stress, feelings of unworthiness, and self-hatred. For some people they live with these burdens for their entire lives, maybe never imagining that healing and wholeness can come.

Now these are just a few of the ways that people can feel bent over. Additionally, we can feel weighed down by grief or loneliness. For others, anxiety and worry can be debilitating. And for yet others, financial concerns, physical or mental health, or relationship struggles can feel like huge burdens that press them down or bind them.

What this passage in Luke helps us to see is that God recognizes the various ways that we can feel bound up – held hostage by the infirmities that press us down. In the case of the woman in the synagogue, it was not necessarily the physical disability that caused her issue. The gospel says that she was bound by a spirit that crippled her. Jesus calls to her and tells her she is set free, and then he touches her and she is able to stand up. Then she praises God.

When the synagogue leader berates Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus responds that he has set her free from what had bound her. Being stuck in a bent physical condition had also impacted her spiritual condition. By healing her, he not only healed a physical ailment, but also released her from a mental ailment that kept her from being her whole self. And Jesus argues that is not the Sabbath the perfect time to set someone free from their bondage. And here he is alluding to the Exodus – of Israel being free by God from their slavery to the Egyptians.

For Jesus, his ministry has been all about setting people free from whatever binds them – giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, freeing the captive, bringing justice to the oppressed. That freedom from bondage is at the heart of Jesus' message. And to him, it is what the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God is all about. Jesus images a world where victims

are set free from abuse, where the color of one's skin makes no difference, and where love is simply that – love, no matter who is on the receiving end of it.

The gospel of Jesus brings a message of healing and wholeness – a message of release from the captivity of whatever binds us. And I think, I hope, deep down, that is why we all come to church. Not just to see our friends and catch up on the news, or to sing the hymns or pray together, or to eat the cookies and join in fellowship. We don't come simply because we feel some obligation to come. I think that we come because in some way we all are bound. And we long for freedom. We long to be let loose of those things that weigh us down and hold us back from the full life that God desires for each of us. And I think also that we yearn to see God's reign fully present, fully active. We desire peace and justice to take the place of war, violence, hatred and oppression.

And we believe that in Christ, we can be unbound. In Christ, we can taste freedom from whatever oppresses us. And as we feel our own bindings begin to drop away, we can be agents of Christ in helping to unbind others. In Christ we can finally stand up, full of praise, and see through his eyes, the vision of health and wholeness that God has for all of creation.