

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 22, 2010
Freedom from Bondage

Why does Jesus feel a need to heal this woman on the Sabbath? He argues that he heals her for the same reason that you release an ox on the Sabbath. But if the woman has been bent over for eighteen years, what is one more day? Really a few hours.

The more I pondered this, the more I was struck by the fact that the woman was bound by Satan for all these years. That is how Luke describes it. He does not say that she has osteoporosis or has a permanent bent back because she has been carrying water many miles to her home every day for years. These are two very possible reasons for her to be bent over. But Luke tells us that she is bound by Satan.

Jesus justifies healing her to give her life. If you do not release a farm animal for a whole day, that animal will not get water. In the heat of the day, an animal's life can be at stake without drinking. But the woman appears not to be in a life threatening situation. Until you take seriously that she is bound by Satan.

Anytime we are bound by the devil, our life is being taken away from us. The devil always takes life and joy. It is God who gives life and joy. Imagine being physically bent over for years. Your life would be slowly taken from you. You would have trouble walking, eating, sleeping. Just as the woman's life was in jeopardy, so is our life when we are bound by Satan.

How are we in bondage to Satan? Anywhere there is sin, we are bond to Satan. The release from sin is forgiveness. Brian Stoffregen offers a definition of forgiveness that I found helpful:

One definition I've used of forgiveness is that one no longer has to let the past determine the present. It is being released from bondage to past mistakes. By forgiving those who have sinned against us, we are freed from bondage to resentments and feelings of revenge. By forgiving ourselves, we are released from continually beating up on ourselves for acting so stupidly or hurtfully. Forgiveness brings release and freedom. Thus, this text isn't just about physical healing, but renewal that we all need.¹

No matter who you are, you need forgiveness. Right now, our community needs to share forgiveness with each other. It is not easy. Many struggle with forgiving themselves and others struggle with forgiving their brothers and sisters in Christ. In the midst of all our struggles with sin, Christ is trying desperately to heal us. Christ is trying to save us from death. Not immediate death, but death from being unable to stand up straight and reach toward the giver of life.

¹ From <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke13x10.htm> on 8-18-10

If we as a community of believers continue to be bound by Satan, we will not be able to see the gift of life right in front of us. If we bend over and look within ourselves forever, be consumed by mistakes and grievances of the past, we will die. But like the woman, we cannot stand up straight on our own. We are not forgiven on our own. We do not have the strength to forgive on our own. Forgiveness is a gift from God through Christ.

Today, when you come to the communion table, remember that you being unbound by Satan. You are forgiven. You are able to stand up straight. Trust in this forgiveness. When you trust that you have been forgiven, share that gift with one another.

Just as the woman must have found it hard to walk around straight after eighteen of being bent over, we will find it hard to offer forgiveness. Especially when we have been hurt deeply. But forgive one another because you have already been released from Satan's grasp! Trust that we are able as a church and as individuals to stand up straight again.