

## Disrupting the Peace: Discerning Sides

### **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.<sup>14</sup>

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 to 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 being done by him.

Last week, we heard Jesus say he came not to bring peace, but a sword which will divide us 3-2 or 2-3. And it was in this 3-2 or 2-3 way that Jesus disrupts the peace which is often achieved by a 5-0 ration which forces us into consensus by force or a 4-1 ratio which is over and against a scapegoat. The 3-2 or 2-3 way means peace will always have tension to it. There will always be groups who are resisting on both sides. The question is: how do we know what side we are on? Thankfully, Luke offers us some stories to answer the question, and here is one of those stories. Listen for God's Spirit: Read Text

Eighteen years. Eighteen years is a long time. Think back to eighteen years ago. That would have been 2007! Where were you? How was life different? Eighteen years ago, Calvin was just a baby and now he's a senior in high school. Eighteen years ago, some of us still had children in the house. Some of us hadn't even thought of moving to Winston Salem. Eighteen years ago, I had a decent head of hair! A lot can happen in eighteen years...and it is especially a long time for someone who is suffering.

So imagine there's this person at church on the sabbath. She has had a crippling spirit which bent her over for eighteen long years. She has no advocates. The greater her disability becomes the more invisible she becomes. We don't know exactly what her condition was. But she was overcome by something so big, perhaps something so oppressive, it crippled her body as well as her spirit for 18 years. And notice: she doesn't cry out for help. She doesn't ask Jesus to heal her, and stays under the radar. Perhaps she knows she not supposed to disturb the peace.

Except, Jesus sees her. What does it feel like to be seen? Perhaps the word is dignifying. I remember hearing a story about a woman who came to a church for the first time. She had a do-rag on her head as she was going through chemo. But she said, the people there didn't treat her any differently. She said, "My cancer wasn't the first thing people saw. My humanity was." Jesus notices the one who everyone else ignored. He calls her over and releases her from the crippling spirit which overwhelmed her body for eighteen long years. And what's the first thing

she does when the burdens are released? She starts crying out in gratitude. She starts disrupting the peace with her “hallelujahs!” and “Amen!” She has been seen. She has been dignified! She has been delivered!

Of course, there is someone who isn’t celebrating. Wonder: who would have a problem with someone being healed and set free? Apparently, someone who is attached to an oppressive system. Someone who keeps peace in a 4-1 kind-of-way. So we hear his critique, and notice he attacks her publicly as he faces the crowd, because she is the one who the rest have cast aside: “There is no healing on the Sabbath. Come back on another day if you want to be healed!” Maybe you heard about the father talking about how many forms he has to sign and resign, that get sent back several times before his disabled child’s Medicaid kicks in. Maybe you heard about how many times people get denied Disability Pay and how many years it takes. And that was before this big deadly bill got passed! “Come back another day if you want to be healed!”

To which Jesus responds in a 3-2 way as he stands with her and says, “Hold on you hypocrite!—you are willing to unbind animals on the sabbath and give them what they need because you need those animals for your livelihood. So why not unbind this daughter of Abraham and give her what she needs after eighteen long years for her livelihood!” Now is it just me or is Jesus bringing the fire!

But hold on! There’s more! For those of us who are thinking the preacher is just preaching another social justice kind of sermon, Luke has slipped us a massive interpretive clue in the story. Somehow, he knew the woman had been suffering for eighteen years. Numbers are big clues in the bible. And wouldn’t you know there is only one other place in scripture where something has been happening to the children of Abraham for eighteen long years. It’s tucked into the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the book of Judges. You know that book in the bible where Israel teeter-totters between having peace and then messing it all up again “by doing what is evil in sight of the Lord.” They have messed things up, and so Israel has been handed over to the king of Moab—an incredibly large Jabba the Hut type gangster named Eglon. Read here:

“The Israelites again did what was evil in sight of the Lord; and the Lord strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel...So the Israelites served King Eglon of Moab **eighteen years**.

But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab. Ehud made for himself a dagger, on cubit in length; and he fastened it to the right side of his thigh under his clothes.

Now Elgon was a very fat man. When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he send the people who carried the tribute on their way. He went to the king and said, “I have a message for you, O king.” So the king said, “Silence!” and all his attendants left his presence. And Ehud came to him now that he was sitting alone in his cool chamber and said, “I have a message from God for you!” So he rose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon’s belly; the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. Then

Ehud went out into the vestibule and closed the doors of the roof chamber and locked them.

After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, “He must be relieving himself<sup>[e]</sup> in the cool chamber.” So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.

Ehud escaped while they delayed and passed beyond the sculptured stones and escaped to Seirah...So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.”

So you see, Luke’s question is clear: are our leaders and churches on the side of getting fat by oppressing others and relieving themselves? Are they silencing those who cry out to God and telling them to come back another day to be relieved of their burdens? Or is God raising up the church to be deliverers who poke holes in the belly of systems which cripple people’s bodies and spirits? In a podcast Dr. Barber spoke with some legislatures down in Texas just before the GOP pushed through a gerrymandering bill to redistrict voters for the midterm election. On the podcast, Dr. Barber shared the vision of people gathering on the front lawn of the capital building, praying and crying out, all of them in rented wheelchairs as a demonstration of how their decisions and policies are crippling us all!

In a time when a big deadly bill takes away healthcare for millions, we must cry out. In a time when budget cuts are made to EC and Special Education programs, we must cry out. As money gets redistributed to the wealthy, while programs are cut for the poor, as burdens are laid heavier and heavier on the immigrant community, as a system of oppression continues to bend us all over, are we going to allow them to lie and cheat and get fat through their authoritarian agenda. Or are we going to cry out in the name of God who raises up people to be deliverers in whatever ways they can?

I know we are tired. I know we are overwhelmed. I know we often don’t know what to do. But here’s a truth I believe in every part of my soul: the deliverers that God is raising up in this moment are not sitting in high rise office spaces or on Capital Hill. They are organizing around kitchen tables and in church basements. They are handing out food at pantries and talking to neighbors on front porches. They are the parents who refuse to let education be stolen from their children, and they are the children who refuse to let dignity be stolen from their classmates. They are the teachers who keep teaching what they are told not to. They are the artists who keep making defiant art even if it won’t be hung in the Smithsonian. They are anyone willing to do what they can to relieve the physical and psychological suffering of someone else.

Because the truth is, the church knows what side to stand on. So we will cry out as often as we need to. And then we will go out with whatever gift we have. We’ll do it with strength. We will do it with love. We will do it with the power of God’s resilient and prophetic Spirit. But it begins with us crying out and calling out our systems which continue to cripple us all. So after we sing, we are going to pray and cry out together. Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we bring you our burdens and we cry out to you! Over and over again in your word you remind us it is remnant which makes the difference. It was a remnant young shepherd boy with five rocks who brought down Goliath. It was the remnant of three boys who faced a tyrant in a furnace to bring the tyrant down. It was a remnant of a few disciples who gathered on Pentecost who changed the world. It was a remnant of deliverers against slavery. A remnant of women fought until all women had a right to vote. It is a remnant in Texas who fights against the gerrymandering. It will be a remnant in North Carolina and Winston Salem. Over and over again, there is a remnant of people who are called to stand where they are, to cry out publicly and take a stand prayerfully against what is unjust and wrong.

For your word in Amos says, "let there be wailing in the public square. Let there be crying out in the streets. For it is then you promise to pass through the midst of your people and it is then justice will roll down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. So we are crying out, today! That the good news must be declared from beyond the pulpit, it must be declared beyond our private prayers and places of worship. It must be declared publicly and prophetically as we prepare for our own moments when we too will have to stand up straight with dignity. So let the wailing begin in our classrooms, in our hospitals, in our factories, in our fields, in our places of worship, and in our homes. Lift us up as one of your many deliverers, brought to life by your Holy breath, and sustained by the power of your Holy Spirit. We speak, we cry out, and we pray in the name of our Lord and Liberator, Jesus Christ, who even after a system of tyranny tried to cripple him and his followers, he rose again and still lives among us and in his followers today. Amen and amen.