

Breaking Through the Pain

August 25, 2019, The Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher
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Jeremiah 1:4-8, Luke 13:10-17

Like so many things in life, there is usually more going on in a situation than we first expect. That is why the Bible even as an ancient document can feel fresh and timeless. Today we look at a snapshot of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is getting a reputation with the common predominantly as a healer. At the same time, Jesus is becoming more of a threat to the religious keepers of the law because of his actions and his words. The leaders are watching him very closely in order to expose him as a fraud. Our reading today is about healing and Jesus' words. He heals an unknown woman who is long suffering. He does so not to do it in the public market place to get the most exposure, but in the house of worship on the Sabbath, the day of rest. Aha the leaders think now we got him; everyone knows there is NO work on the Sabbath. To this day Orthodox Jews will go into great contortions in order to avoid anything that might be considered work. They have their non-Jewish neighbors turn on their lights for them so that they do not commit the sin of working on the Sabbath. They try to think ahead to make sure all their needs are met before sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. But we all know life cannot be so neat. People suffer, and sometimes action even on the day of rest is more compassionate and holy than inaction.

A read from Luke Chapter 13:10-17 **Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman**

Now he 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.

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

When you take a close look at the gospels you realize that Jesus' healing ministry a big part of his ministry. Curing lepers; giving sight to the blind; raising little girl and a good friend from the dead are a few recorded instances. And what about all the ones the Gospel writers did not include? In reality, we don't know how many people Jesus cured but all 4 gospel writers made sure that his healings are recorded when telling about the ministry of Jesus. People came to him to be healed. People followed him from town to town and the synagogue leaders tried to get out ahead of it by saying to the crowd. There is a time for healing in the six days of the week. But today is not that time.

We can understand how his reputation for healing would get him noticed, his parables may be difficult to understand, his teachings about God's kingdom may be a bit esoteric to grasp but seeing a lame person walk or a withered hand restored, now that is tangible. Healing of some kind is known to all of us. Let's face it, our bodies are far from perfect. Eventually something in our bodies goes a bit haywire. As we read about Jesus in the pages of scripture what he makes seem so effortless. With eight words, Jesus relieves a woman with a crippling ailment that has lasted 18 years. With a few words and this woman who suffered in pain for over half her lifetime is cured. Usually it is not that easy. Healing is a process; it takes time and effort to see and feel results. Suffering, suffering can last a lifetime. We have a complicated relationship with Jesus' acts of healing. Our faith is challenged when no matter how much we pray; some children do not wake up. No matter how we try, healing may not fix what is wrong with us. There are miracles that happen today. Some of you are living proof of those inexplicable miracles. The stories that even confound the most skilled physician or surgeon. There is a lot we do not know when it comes to healing of our bodies, our minds and our spirits. When we look at our own relationship to healing, well it's complicated. First, we deny the need for healing, which means we also deny the pain that tells us something is not right. A couple years ago, a friend and I went to the State Fair. She had fallen a couple days before but insisted she was fine, just a little bruised. We walked all over the fair. Two days later she discovered that she

had cracked a couple of ribs in her fall. The best thing for broken ribs is to NOT go to the State Fair!!!

We don't look too kindly to our own imperfections. Our daughters would tell you that I was in the "Walk it off." School of thought. The mom who would say why don't you get up, get ready for school, have some breakfast and then see how you feel. If we work harder, move forward whatever is hurting would simply go away. They grumble about that method even to this day! Healing gets complicated.

Even though crowds sought out Jesus to heal them, for Jesus, physical healing wasn't the main thing that he was about. Jesus had a message to deliver. And that message is that God's kingdom is here. God's kingdom involves connection to God and connection with each other. When a woman who had been bent and suffering for 18 long years comes before him with hope in her eyes knowing that this man from Galilee is a healer, Jesus responds. He does not tell her to wait until sundown, but helps her and relieves her pain so that she does not have to suffer one moment longer. For Jesus the kingdom of god is not complicated. It is knowing you are loved and loving God and others in return. Not only is Jesus relieving this bent woman from her ailment but he is relieving all his listeners from the burden of following the law in ways that traps them and others. He tells those around him alleviating the pain of another's surpasses the need to follow the letter of the law.

Our human suffering is not limited to physical pain. The pain that comes from brokenness between each other is a burden that we all carry. We cannot go to the doctor to fix the pain when hurt, and wrongs are directed to each other and when resentment pulls us apart.

Carrying the burden of a relationship schism came home to me recently. This coming week my husband, Gregg and I will be hosting about 100 people, mostly from out of town. You see our daughter got married in Berlin Germany, where they are living in June. Many of the family and friends could not go. We helpfully suggested that we would host a celebration of their marriage over Labor Day. This week people from Phoenix to Boston; Florida to Virginia. One of my tasks was to assign where people sit at the party. Now I know to most of you are thinking what is the big deal and why should this be included in a sermon! I also know that some of you understand what I am talking about. Seat placing can get very complicated.

Jesus even talked about who gets what seat at a banquet! (but I digress) As I was arranging the seating, I realized even for this very happy occasion and with very upright families comprised of decent people, the burden of brokenness in relationships weighs us down. As I assigned table seating there are the obvious ones. I did not seat the recently divorced parents at the same table, or the ex-wife with the widow. But what about the sisters who are not speaking to each other, or the sisters-in-law who feel like rivals? Some are products of deep resentment toward each other over slights and infractions happening over time. Others are major breaks that are in need of reconciliation. I realize sadly that the celebration of two people coming together does not always overcome those who choose to turn from each other.

I know, that if Jesus is capable of relieving the suffer of a random woman who had been carrying her burden for 18 years, with God's help these rifts and brokenness within families can also begin to heal.

Jesus' message is that the kingdom of God is at hand and in God's kingdom, we use love, we turn toward forgiveness rather than resentment.

God wants us to be healed and to free us from the burdens that weigh us down. God wants us to be the best we can so that we can fulfill God's plan for us. In Jeremiah, God says I know you. I know what your potential is that you will benefit not only yourself but be there for others. Jesus told the woman so bent "Woman, man, you are set free from your ailment." Jesus can do the same for us. The leader in the synagogue saw Jesus as a threat to their way of thinking and their neat habits they had built up and solidified over many years. And so, they sought to call him out. In turn Jesus called them out to open not only their minds but their hearts as well. They were in as much need of healing as the woman who reached out to him after a lifetime of hurt.

Today, this week think of where you may need to heal, ask god to help you with relief from long held brokenness in your lives. And whatever that healing may be spiritual physical or emotional seek to repair it. Our God the one who knows each of us, and our God is one who has plans for us. Let us ask God today that we might be relieved of the burdens that are holding us down so that we are free to do what God has planned for us. Thanks be to God Amen