



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **AMEN**

In 1981, right before Rodney and I got married, I was working at the bowling alley, and I bent over to get a size 13 shoe for a customer and opps! Something went terribly wrong. In an instant, I wrenched my back. Such a thing had never happened to me before. Was it a muscle, a tear, a disk, or nerves? Whatever it was, was so painful I could not even stand up. My co-worker tried to get me to sit down in my office, but even that was too painful. I called Rodney and he came to get me. You might ask him what a feat that was getting me in his little opal. Thank God, it was a muscle spasm, and I can say that I have not had one since nor do I ever want one again.

Many of you might know the pain I am talking about. When your back hurts, everything hurts. I am not a medical professional, but I do realize that the back is the super highway of nerves and muscles in our bodies.

When I see the children walking to school with their backpacks, I cringe thinking about the weight they are carrying. Wonder what the long term effect of this constant weight on those little bodies might be. I know when we pack the weekend bags for the children who are food insecure, we try hard to keep them under 4 pounds. Sheila Noordzy once told me she put a bag in a child's backpack and he fell right over backwards, because of the weight. Maybe it is a good thing that children get many of their textbooks online, as tablets are pretty light.

Well, our story today begins with Jesus noticing a "women who had a spirt that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight." Doubt she had backpackilepsy, but we don't know her actual diagnosis. All we know is that she was crippled and bent over for more than 18 years. We can imagine that her pain might have been severe. Yet, she came on the Sabbath to worship her Maker, to worship God. That folks, is devotion. I would guess not many of us, in her position would venture to Christ the Servant on Sunday morning if we were bent over in pain. I will say

though that the coldest temperature that I ever saw on my car thermometer of -36 did not deter some of you from coming to worship on that super cold winter morning. We are where we need to be on Sunday morning, in worship. And so was our crippled woman. And because of that, she received a very special blessing from God.

Jesus was in the synagogue that particular morning. He has been invited by the Synagogue ruler, on the Sabbath, to address the congregation. Many people are present as they have heard about this young man from Nazareth. They are, no doubt, excited to have him there in their own hometown synagogue. And then enter the cripple, the bent over woman. And Jesus signals her out and calls her over to where he is standing. Luke does not even tell us her name. We have no idea who she is, rich or poor, old, or young. We do know that she has been plagued with this back issue caused by a spirit, for a long long time. Jesus touches her and she is healed. She is able to stand up straight and she begins to worship and praise God.

Sounds like a simple story of healing by Jesus, but what we need to be aware of is that Jesus has just broken at least six strict cultural rules:

1. Jesus speaks to a woman. In civilized Jewish society men did not speak to women in public, not even their wives.
2. Jesus calls the woman to the middle of the synagogue. This challenges the norm of a male monopoly on knowledge of and access to God.
3. Jesus touches the woman. This goes against all holiness codes of Mosaic law. Men could not touch women as they were unclean due to their seductive sinfulness.
4. Jesus calls her "daughter of Abraham". This term is not found in any Jewish literature or Scripture. Quite revolutionary as it is believed that women were saved only through their men. Calling her daughter would make her a true member of Israel with equal standing before God.
5. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. That was thought to be "work" and considered breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment. By doing this Jesus showed God's compassion for people over ceremony and ritual.
6. Jesus through this healing challenges the belief that her illness is a direct punishment from God for sin. And He explains that she is ill, not because God willed it, but because there is evil in the world. In other words, bad things happen to good people.

Jesus did all this in just a few seconds. All while He was only thinking of this poor woman, who had only looked at the ground for 18 years. God's love for her overshadowed the strict Jewish laws. As for the crowd gathered, this action of Jesus was shocking. Jesus was showing them a better way. He could have debated with the synagogue leaders about whether or not it was legal to heal this woman on the Sabbath, but it would not have accomplished the same WOW factor. Actually, that discussion was saved for after the act of healing. Maybe this was Jesus' way of showing us that it is often better to act in love then later on ask for forgiveness instead of first getting permission.

Jesus was now in front of those gathered in the synagogue. What or whom would they put their trust in? The law driven by decades of history of the Israelites or this man Jesus. Remember, Jesus was still walking on the face of the earth. He had not yet been put to death. He had not yet been resurrected. Would the people believe that Jesus was truly the

Son of God and that he came to save them? Would they believe that God really cared about them? And so, we have the concern of the Pharisees who not only wrote many of the laws the Jewish people were to adhere to, but they also enforced them. This healing of the crippled woman was another of the events that led the religious leaders to be fearful of Jesus.

The Pharisees relished telling others that God was angry with them. That was their reason for maladies of the people. Even though they made up and tried to force people to obey laws which God had never give, some of which were so strange that God would never have thought of them. So, when the people broke one of those newly created commands, the Pharisees convinced them that they were sinners and God did not like sinners. So, if someone like our bent over woman was in that condition it was because God was mad at her.

Thank God the Pharisees are long gone, and Jesus did come to be our Lord and Savior. There should be no more confusion. God's grace trumps Mosaic law every time.

Years ago, I spent time with my group of Associates in Ministry in Milwaukee serving at a homeless shelter downtown. We brought lunch to the men and women that used this day shelter to warm up on a cold morning, to fill their stomachs and find Jesus. It was a most amazing place and the only one of its kind at that time in Milwaukee. The gal who ran this day shelter, was Marne Brown. An amazing woman who saw a need and filled it. You see, there were several shelters to go to in the evening for a meal and a bed for the night, but there was no place to go during the day. She worked with those homeless that wanted to get a job and find permanent housing. She helped them get driver's licenses, mailboxes, education, and clothes to go on an interview. It was one place where God was oh so present as there was no judgement, just a shower and clean underwear for everyone who wanted it. The name of the shelter was Repairers of the Breach. Our Isaiah reading this morning where the shelter name came from. So, it is all about God and his followers making a better place, living a better life.

Jesus is our Repairer of the breach between God and man's sin. He came to save us from ourselves by dying on the cross and rising to new life. Same as he did for the crippled woman in our story. And folks it all started with her going to worship God, going to be in the presence of the Lord. So don't let your sin weigh you down like a backpack. Give your troubles to God, as he has a much stronger back than you or I do. And live into the newness of life that comes through the forgiveness of our sins that only God's grace can erase. Stop looking at the ground! Rather, come and join us each Sunday morning as we worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus! **AMEN**