### “Be Set Free” Steve Finlan for The First Church, August 21, 2022

**Isaiah 58:9–12**

9If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, 10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. 11 The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. 12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

**Luke 13:10–17**

10Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11And 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. 12When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14But 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.” 15But 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? 16And 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?” 17When 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.

The Isaiah passage is refreshingly straightforward. It calls for an end to gossip (“the pointing of the finger”) and indifference to the needs of the afflicted (58:9–10). If people will stop “speaking evil” and start offering food to the hungry, “Then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (58:10) God will “satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail” (58:11). What a stirring promise, driven by an emphasis on compassion.

For when you choose the pathway of light, you are freeing yourself from the burden of negativity and resentment. Once released from this negativity, your spirit rises and begins to live more harmoniously with God’s ways. Your inner god-ness will shine forth.

This passage is from the section of the book we call Third Isaiah, written after the return from the Babylonian Exile. There was quite a bit of poverty in the land, and some ruined and abandoned towns. That makes verse 12 all the more meaningful: “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” This was a great promise to people who saw many breaches and ruined streets. You can be someone who contributes to rebuilding and renewal. As you choose to rebuild spiritually, others will see this goodness and may follow your example.

Whether the “watered garden” suggests a resurgence of agriculture or a beautification of homes in the physical world, it is another encouraging word. The message seems to be “you have suffered. If you will stay true to the values of the covenant, I will help you to recover.” A few verses earlier, the author had said “share your bread with the hungry . . . Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly” (58:7–8). So these changes will result in “your healing.” It is a big promise, and we know God is true and his promise is reliable.

The gospel story is about a healing. As often with Jesus, he notices a downcast woman, in this case one who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:11). He comes and doesn’t even ask her if she needs healing. He just announces that she is free from her ailment (13:12). She is able to stand up straight, and begins praising God.

But the leader of the synagogue is a nitpicker who says he can’t be doing such work on the Sabbath. He utters one of the most ridiculous of criticisms of Jesus when he says “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day” (13:14).

Jesus uses common sense to point out that they would do work for an ox or a donkey on the Sabbath; why is it wrong to help a woman who had suffered for eighteen years? Implied in Jesus’ response is this: “don’t you have any compassion for a human being? Are you such a stickler for ritual that you don’t think a woman should be helped on the Sabbath?”

Jesus’ rejoinder is effective. His enemies are ashamed and silent, while the ordinary people are rejoicing over the miracle of the healing.

So it’s interesting who gets healed in these two stories. In the Isaiah passage, healing will rise for anyone who gives generously to the needy. It is the *giver* who is healed. This is unexpected. In the gospel story, it is a woman who doesn’t even ask for healing. Jesus can tell she needs it, and he gives it. That’s a little unexpected, too. Maybe he could read her need in her eyes, or in her posture. Still, it departs from the more common pattern, where someone *asks* for healing, or reaches out to touch his garment to get it.

I think this kind of healing is what awaits all of us in the afterlife, although it can begin to happen in this life. Jesus can tell if you need healing, and he will give it. Maybe it is emotional healing. Maybe it is a relationship that needs healing. Jesus can help with that. Maybe it’s a tendency to become despondent or pessimistic. Jesus can help with that.

Where do *you* need healing? Imagine Jesus coming into that place or that relationship and performing the healing. Maybe you just need to stop judging yourself and thinking you’re not good enough. Imagine Jesus hugging you and telling you it’s alright, that he loves you. We can use our prayer time to visualize healing, to picture reconciliation. Imagine being told “you are set free from your ailment.” There are worse things that you can do with your imagination. Use your imagination to encourage spiritual healing. Set up your good intentions to start perhaps with small annoying things that create roadblocks, but don’t be afraid to aim for the stars!

And you can be empowered to help those who are in need. Your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom will lift. You can be a repairer of the breach. You are gifted with a divine spark. Let your light shine.