

Pastor Gwen's Sermon
11th Sunday after Pentecost
"Are you bent over?"
Sunday, August 24, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Quite a long time ago I heard this story. You might have heard a similar one. It is about how some people are never satisfied.

Hank and Mable had been married for 40 years. Hank turned 60 a few months earlier and now they were celebrating Mable's 60th birthday. During the birthday party, Hank walked into another room and was surprised to see a fairy godmother appear before him. She said, "Hank, this is your lucky day. I am here to grant you one wish. What would you like?" He thought for a moment, and said, "Well, I would really like to have a wife who was thirty years younger than me." The fairy godmother said, "No problem." She waived her wand and "Poof", suddenly Hank was 90 years old.

I bet that Hank was a bit bent out of shape by the way that one turned out. So be careful what you ask for!

I have a friend in Hartford who was always telling me to relax and don't get bent out of shape. She was always so calm about whatever was happening. Truthfully, I wished I could be more like her and not let stuff bother me so much. Not get bent out of shape! Do you ever find yourself getting dissatisfied, bothered by stuff that is happening and just plain frustrated over it.

Our reading this morning is about two people who are rather unhappy. I am sure that you can guess who the first one is. Yup, the woman who was physically bent over. The other was the religious man who was spiritually out of his mind. One was crippled by a spirit of weakness and the other was crippled by a spirit of legalism and bitterness. And Jesus wants to help them both!

Our story begins with Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. Imagine all the things she was unable to do for all those years. She could not look her family or friends, if she had any, in the eye. I bet she found it difficult to carry or lift things. Probably difficult to make dinner unless she had a very low table to work on and a fire on the ground for cooking.

Jesus sees her pain and calls her forward. Many things here are going against the Jewish law. Men are not to speak to women who are not their wives. Women were not generally accepted in the synagogue. Jesus touches the woman, which as you can imagine, is a real no-no. Then He calls her a daughter of Abraham, which is something totally new. This makes her a full-fledged member of Israel, equal to men.

Opps! Women were only thought to have access through their husbands. And then the biggie comes when Jesus heals on the Sabbath.

Jesus said to her, “Woman you are set free from your ailment”. Jesus touched her and immediately she straightened up and praised God. She could now lift her hands in the air and thank the Lord for his healing ways. Her life was drastically changed. The evil that caused her physical calamity was not her sin, but rather the devil, Jesus tells the crowd. No direct relation to her sins, as was the thought at the time. She was free at last and thankfully praised God.

Our other person who was bent out of shape, out of sorts, did not have the same reaction as the woman. He was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. He had cured this woman’s affliction. So, this leader of the synagogue said, “There are six days on which work ought to be done, come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” Jesus, hearing his words called him a “hypocrite”. He then goes on to use an example of untying a donkey to led him to water as work that most people would do on the Sabbath. In Jesus mind there is no reason that the woman had to wait another day, another minute to be unbound from 18 years of Satanic torture. And the crowd was appreciative of this and really got it. They were upright very unlike this leader of the synagogue.

As for the woman no one really knew what her ailment really was. Maybe it was osteoporosis. After all, Luke, our Gospel writer was a doctor. He probably had some understanding of her condition. Luke tells us that Jesus said to us that she was bound by Satan. The demonic influence had provoked her illness and Jesus casts out the demon and physically heals her.

Are there days for you when you feel like you just can’t go on? You are at your wits end and nothing is going right? I have had some of those days too! And I suspect that many people do as well. You can’t stop drinking. You can’t stop taking drugs. You can’t stop being bitter. You can’t forgive. Or my favorite, you can’t stop crying. At least not until you realize that all those can’t’s are the devil’s work. I will always remember my grandma Brown telling me that there is no such word as “can’t”. And she was right, you will not find it in Webster’s dictionary. And she was especially correct when it came to doing the Lord’s work. It is the devil’s work in your mind to make you think you cannot do something that God has asked you to do.

Our dear Gunny, who just passed away, was trained as a puppy to not go out of the yard. We had an electric field that went from the box inside the house out 60 feet. So, Gunny learned in a quick hurry that if he went further, he would get a warning beep and then the next step a zap. The dear boy had several collars. One for the electric fence, one for a remote when he went in the woods with Leigh or Rodney, a legal collar with his licenses and a no bark collar, which never worked. After years of testing the electric fence, he just gave up. He knew it was useless to go further because he could get zapped. But he never figured out which collar he had on. He didn’t think he could go without a zap. And so, he stayed in the 60-foot circumference around the house. At that point it was not the fence keeping him in, but it was the thought in his mind that kept him close.

Do we get caught up in the same fallacy, when we feel we can’t get out of the shape we are in. We can’t do anymore. We can’t do what God is asking us to do because we are afraid of getting zapped, of some sort of backlash. Or maybe it is because we are tired of trying?

The burdens we carry in this world today are heavy and plentiful. Worry and anxiety can steal your peace and have you looking at your feet. Heartache, pain, frustration, and never being satisfied, can split you right in half. Being trapped with some deep dark secret can prevent you from looking up.

Well, folks, it is looking to Jesus that will get you out of this rut, just like it did for the bent over woman that he healed. You can hide your pain and frustration from others with a smile, but Jesus seeks you and feels your pain. He opens his arms to you, wherever you are, whenever you need Him. He wants to heal all His children, so he opens His arms to all. Jesus has already taken all your pain with him to the cross. He was crucified and was buried so on the 3rd day. He rose again to save us all and give us abundant life here on earth as well as forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in heaven with Him one day.

Remember, how our bent over woman, praised God in thanksgiving for her miraculous healing. But our leader of the synagogue was not so happy. In fact, the crowd praising God probably made him even angrier. This healing was against all the rules! Yet, these followers rejoiced at all the wonderful things Jesus was doing. Now very angry, our legalistic synagogue leader, gets called out by Jesus as he and his ideas are put to shame.

When I was at seminary, we did a study of a large Lutheran church in a posh suburban neighborhood. It had what we called the “Cold Water committee”. Whenever the fire of God starts burning in the hearts of some of the members, they rise up and pour cold water on it. Wherever there is a new and creative way to do church, they pour cold water on that idea. The Cold-Water committee is not an elected committee, the members are self-appointed. And we are blessed not have one here at Christ the Servant. A Cold-Water committee thinks it is their job to make sure things don’t get out of hand in their church. Their favorite phrase is, “We’ve never done it that way before”. Just like the ruler of the synagogue, these people may even quote a little scripture, but they are more into rules than into the liberty that Jesus gives.

The Cold-Water committee is very prone to getting bent out of shape when people do something that is against tradition. We have some folks like that even in Park Falls. Churches that think their way is the only way and churches that are not willing to participate in ecumenical relationships because they would have to give up their religious traditions. But Jesus has a warning for us today in this Scripture passage. When you allow traditions to overshadow the Word of God, it is dangerous.

God’s laws are not to tie you down, but rather to set you free! The law of God was never meant to restrict you, but to set you free. The law leads us to Christ so that we too can be justified by faith in Him. The Cold-Water committee usually finds joy in getting bent out of shape when they could so easily enjoy their faith and the relationship they can have with Jesus.

In fact, I purpose that we should all find joy in God’s kingdom. Luke concludes this story of Jesus healing a crippled woman with an observation that the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing. We too are blessed to see all the wonderful things that God is doing in our world. God is ever present in our world in our lives today. We never need to be bent over. Jesus came into the world to straighten us out.

So, whatever is broken in your life, Jesus can fix it. If you are bent out of shape by suffering, Jesus sees you and calls you. He came to set you free from Satan’s bondage, and when he touches you, you will never be the same again! You may be tempted to want to follow man made rules, but Jesus came to free you from the chains and weights of the law. You just need to let him. Let him satisfy your need to do better, to get ahead or get a wife 30 years younger. After all, God is still in control.

Jesus wants you to be like the entire crowd and rejoice at all the wonderful things God is doing. Rejoice and live the life abundant that God has planned for you in his kingdom today!

David Dykes has written an additional line to the Humpty Dumpty childhood rhyme.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.'
All the King's horses and all the King's men;
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Jesus Christ came to your wall;
And on the Cross, He died for your fall;
Regardless of death and in spite of your sin;
Through grace, He can put you together again.

Isn't that a nice verse. Here is another one.

Psalm 84:11
For the Lord God is a sun and shield
The Lord will give grace and glory!
No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

May God bless you richly and keep you upright all of your days. AMEN