

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC

Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett

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Oh, My Aching Back!

Jeremiah 1:4-8, 17-19, Luke 13:10-17

Are we waiting to be healed/freed? What can happen when we are?

A woman, crippled for 18 years, bent over and unable to stand up straight, encounters Jesus. Immediately she stands up straight. There are quite a few back problems here at Hillcrest. I know there is a great deal of sympathy for this woman, and quite a few people who would get in line for a healing like that!

But, we do not have all the information. She had been crippled for eighteen years, but how old was she? How did it happen? An accident? Was it work related, or part of her aging process? It does not say she was crippled from birth, so something happened to take away her health and bend her over.

But Jesus reverses it. First he sees her. He sees her as she is, and he does not turn away but makes eye contact with her. Then he calls out to her, welcomes and invites her to be with him. Next he tells her she is free, free of her ailment, healthy and able to move. Finally, he touches her. Love, compassion, and relationship, are Jesus' Way. He sets her free so she can engage with life.

But the Pharisee is outraged at this healing. It can't be done on the Sabbath! It has to be done on the right day, the right way, to the right person, after the right ritual and offering. He would have the woman wait until the right time and place.

Jesus makes the Pharisee look like a heartless fool. He points out an exception to the rule of not working on the Sabbath. “You can give your donkey a drink of water! Why can you not show compassion to a woman who is suffering, now, today?! Why should she wait until tomorrow for God’s healing?!”

The Pharisee thinks it is no big deal for her to just come back tomorrow, or any of the 6 Non-Sabbath days of the week. But if that is so, why has this woman had to wait 18 years’ worth of 6 days? 5,616 days! Why must she wait one more minute to be set free from this heavy weight on her body and soul?

Set free- Jesus does not say healed, he tells her she is set free. He knows it is not just physical things that bind and weigh down our hearts and minds and spirits. The world ostracizes and discriminates, and people isolate themselves in pain. So he ask the bigger question, “ought not this woman... be set free from bondage on the sabbath day?” What better day but God’s day to be set free, to be made whole in body, heart, mind and spirit, to be reunited in community?

We do not know why this woman was made to wait 5,616 days. But Jesus did not want her to wait one more. He wanted her to be free of the heavy things that bent her over and kept her from being able to engage and participate in the life around her. And when she was, she immediately began to praise God! She was filled with joy and possibilities. We can only begin to imagine what she would now do with this new found freedom after 18 years of bondage!

Jesus was all about freedom, new life, possibilities, and hope, not only for the future, but for right now. What are the heavy things that bind you? What are the heavy things that drag us down and bind us? Each of us carry things that burden us, weigh us down and bend us over. They can be hurts about the past, fears about the present, or even fragile dreams for the future. They can be personal, or things between people, but they keep us from the freedom that will allow us to grow as individuals and as a community.

Today I would like to invite you into a meditation with me. You can choose to participate or to just sit quietly. As you feel able, get yourself comfortable. Put your feet flat on the floor and close your eyes. Take a couple of slow deep breaths.

Now, while you continue to relax and take slow deep breaths, visualize something about your life or about the church, that has bothering you about the past, concerning you about the present, or worrying you about the future. It may be something that happened, or perhaps it is something that you dream of or wish for. Perhaps it relates to people who have been here before, or the new minister to come. Perhaps it relates to health, or job, or school, the economy, or our world. It is weighing you down, so heavy that you are bent over, unable to stand up straight.

Now take that “something” and see yourself wrapping it up in a soft white cloth, something that will protect it, something that will gently cradle it. It is important to you, or you would not be carrying it around with you. Think of a safe

place that you can put this package. It can be at the altar here in the front of the sanctuary, on a closet shelf, or at the foot of a tree. Someplace safe and secure, someplace only you and one other person are going to know where it is. See yourself setting it gently there. Now take a couple of slow, deep relaxing breaths.

Look at the package. You can see it is wrapped up so it is protected, and you have put it in a safe place. Now ask God to watch over it, to take care of it, to handle it. Give it into God's care. Perhaps you will want to see yourself actually handing it to God.

Now let it go. Take mental scissors and watch your hand cut the strings that bind you to this package. Leave it as God's responsibility. Feel the weight of it lift from your hands, your arms, your back, your shoulders and your head. Every part of your body is lighter and free of the burden. Take a couple of slow, deep relaxing breaths. Now let God's love and joy flow in to you. Feel it enter the top of your head, flow down your arms and out your fingertips. Feel it run down your spine and through your body, over your hips and knees and out through the bottom of your feet. It is filling you up, straightening your back and lifting you up. Enjoy it! Now, As you are ready, gently open your eyes.

As we came in this morning, we came with concerns that could cripple us, bend us over and prevent us from standing up with the weight of our cares. But as Jesus did with the woman, God sees us.

God sees us as we are, and God does not turn away. God makes eye contact with us. God calls out to us, welcoming us, and invites us to be with God. God sets us free, free of our burdens and enables to engage fully, in a healthy way with life. God touches us and carries our burdens and cares for us.

Love, connection, compassion, and relationship, are God's way of healing for us. God wants a whole life for each of us individually and for all of us here together. God wants us to be able to engage fully in community together.

God does not want us to wait one more minute. Right now we are free of the heavy things that can keep us from being able to engage and participate in the life around us. Now we can immediately begin to praise God! Now we can be filled with joy and possibilities.

Imagine what we can do with this new found freedom after days, and months and years of bondage! What will it be? Where will we go? Who will we serve? How many was can we share the love, connection, compassion and relationship that we have received? Amen.