

## It's Time to Learn

Luke 13:10-17

August 22, 2010

Teachers are a special lot. I know I've been married to one for forty years – today. Teachers are creatures of God's – creations of God's – imbued with special gifts – gifts of patience and love and hope and optimism – a people especially created to minister to those entrusted to them – a people created so uniquely that God had the Savior of the world come among us as one of them.

Our Gospel reading this morning according to Luke is another one of those times when Jesus is portrayed teaching. It's a wonderfully appropriate text for us on this day when we recognize the beginning of the school year. There's a message in it for both those of us who are taught and those of us who teach.

Jesus and his disciples were still on their way to Jerusalem. It was the Sabbath. They stopped off at a synagogue and Jesus did what was expected of a rabbi on the Sabbath – he taught. We don't know what he said during the lecture time of his teaching but we certainly know what he said and did afterward. He provided those attending his synagogue class a little practical, real life visual aid – a model of what he believed and what he wanted others to know about God and God's world and the way God looks at what's important about us. The object lesson worked, although there were some present who flunked because of their inability to comprehend the point of his action.

The situation was this (and listen carefully to the way Luke described the scene): Jesus saw, "...a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all." Did you catch it? The woman was crippled by a spirit – she was spiritually crippled if you will. The way I interpret this is: she did not feel good about herself. She was crippled – bent over – because of what she thought about herself.

And Jesus noticed her. He noticed her condition. He saw her true crippledness. And, he initiated a relationship with her by calling her to him and talking to her and touching her and thus healing her. I don't believe it was the touch alone that did it – that healed the woman. I think the woman's healing resulted from what happened in her heart and her mind when Jesus noticed her as someone worth his time – someone more than the crippled physical body she walked around as – someone, someone else was willing to talk with – someone, someone else wanted to relate to enough to invite her to come to where he was – someone, someone else felt was worth touching. Jesus saw in the woman someone other than the one the community saw. He didn't see her as disabled or poor or uneducable or a victim or spoiled or shy or brash or conceited or ... he saw her – a child of God's – an heir of God's blessings – which is the meaning behind the reference later in the account, "a daughter of Abraham."

Very quickly: Abraham was the great, great granddaddy of Israel and he and his wife, Sarah, both almost 100 years of age, were going to become parents and a great nation would be the result and the nation that would result would be a blessing to the world – blessed to be a blessing – not blessed to consider themselves better than anyone else.

The crippled woman was a daughter of Abraham (and Sarah) in the sense that she was an ancestor of Abraham's and Sarah's and as such she was heir to all of the blessings of God. As a result of her being a daughter of Abraham and Sarah she was also called to be a blessing to the whole world. As a daughter of Abraham and Sarah she was to think more of herself than the labels the people in her community had put on her. She was a part of God's great salvation despite her being bent over and when she was reminded of that by

the attention Jesus showed her, she stood up straight – the part of her that was bent down because of her shame went away. The woman is not to be known or remembered as a sad victim but as a daughter of Abraham and Sarah – a daughter of Israel – a person of importance, of worth – one of God’s – like what we said to Tate and his family a few minutes ago.

Friends, Jesus was saying to those gathered in that synagogue that day and is saying to us sitting in this sanctuary today: “You are important” – “You are of value” – “You are a child of God” – “Don’t be ashamed of who God has created you to be” – “Stand up straight” – “You are important to me.”

Jesus doesn’t want us to be controlled by the names the world wants to label us with – “poor” – “uneducable” – “slow” – “backward” – “rich” – “dumb” – “college prep” – “advanced placement” – “slow-learners” – “learning disabled.” Jesus doesn’t want us to be crippled by negative attitudes about ourselves. He wants us to be all we can be. We are daughters and sons of Abraham and Sarah along with the woman in our story this morning. She is our sister. Her name is Christian - that’s what we are told in this morning’s story – that’s why we are baptized – to be reminded of whose we are – who it is that promises to work in our lives. Christ notices us and calls to us to come to him so that he can say, “You are free from the spirit that cripples you. You are free from your insecurities – you are free from the restraints the labels of this world sometimes mean or cause – you are worthy in my eyes – you are my brothers and sisters – you are whole. Now, believe it, stand up straight, and go in peace. Go and show others how Christ has freed you from the guilt or shame or embarrassment that cripples you. Go and be all God intends you to be!”

Seems like a pretty good place to end a story, doesn’t it? Well, the story doesn’t end there the way the author of Luke records it.

Remember that this encounter between Jesus and the woman happened on the Sabbath and the religious leader of the synagogue wasn’t too pleased about what went down as a result of the day it was. As far as he was concerned the woman had suffered eighteen years and she should have suffered one more day rather than break the Sabbath law against doing work on the Sabbath – “one more day of suffering surely wouldn’t have mattered” was his position. It was more important to him that the law be adhered to than that suffering be relieved.

And this is one of those places we sense Jesus showing more than a little annoyance with those who saw things differently than him. We can almost hear the anger and volume in the words he used to respond to those present who believed the religious law to be more important than the relieving of human suffering: “You hypocrites! The physical health, the mental health, the spiritual health, the emotional health of this child of God’s is more important than any rules. Meeting the needs of those who suffer – doing the just thing – is what I am calling you to do.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as children, teachers and other school personnel head back to school, a good thing for all of us to remember is: everyone is important to God. First, we need to hear the message in our own hearts – let it heal us of our insecurities, of those things that cripple us – and then go and share it with those men and women, children and youth who are crippled by the images they have of themselves – who are in need of being noticed – of being talked to – of being touched – in the name of Jesus Christ.

AMEN

