



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Date: 22nd August 2010

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Luke 13:10-17

A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

¹⁵ The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?" ¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Background of the reading

Visiting teachers were commonly asked to speak in synagogues on the Sabbath. So it was not unusual for Jesus to teach in one of the synagogues.

In the Greek text it says that in the synagogue was a woman with a "Spirit of weakness/illness" that had a grip on her. It seems as if she was crippled and could not walk properly. Therefore in the eyes of her society her "illness or disability" was seen as the result of her sins or the grip the devil had in her life. Jesus spotted her. He looked at her with eyes of love and compassion. He called her and without hesitance she came to Jesus. He then spoke and healed her of her weakened spirit. He touched her and she could walk normal again. This was of course also not allowed since the woman was regarded as ritually "unclean" and by

touching her Jesus became unclean as well. But Jesus was not bothered because it did not matter to him. What mattered more was the tragedy of the woman who could not walk properly.

She immediately praised God once she realized she was walking again. She understood that the miracle came from God grasping Jesus' true mission namely to show the people the way to God.

Although her response was to praise God the leader of the synagogue had a different response. But then it was the Sabbath and no one was allowed to do anything on that day. So the leader of the synagogue complains and without rebuking Jesus said to the crowd that they must remember that there are six days to be healed meaning that on a Sabbath no work has to be done. He was angry because JESUS did not follow the Law and as a Rabbi He ought to know better. Actually the leader wanted the people to reject the miracle of Jesus.

Jesus answered by saying that it is allowed to loosen the animals and give them water on the Sabbath but not to help this woman, a true Jew, a daughter of Abraham who was also tied by an evil spirit. Jesus pointed out that a person is much more important than an animal and His enemies saw nothing wrong in helping their animals on the Sabbath. The total hypocrisy and foolishness of the thinking of the religious leaders was obvious. As a result Jesus' opponents were humiliated but the crowds were delighted. Jesus left his opponents stunned. None of them could think of anything else to say.

Jesus referred to the woman as the daughter of Abraham to emphasize the fact that she was of their own flesh and blood. She was their "neighbour". They ought to adhere to the commandment of love first before any other commandment.

Why is this story in the Gospel of Luke? Well to be precise there are three accounts in Luke where Jesus healed people on the Sabbath day with two being in the synagogue. Luke is showing us the hostility Jesus faced from official Judaism of his day. They were hostile to Jesus because he violated their oral traditions and self made laws. He associated with tax collectors and sinners. He exposed their hidden agendas and double standards like we find in this passage. It is ok to loosen your animals on the Sabbath but not to help a disabled woman. Looking for the true fruits of Old Testament piety (pai - ety) —justice, mercy, and humility —Jesus found instead the worst of all sins: hypocrisy.

On the other hand Luke's emphasis on God's love for the outcasts and oppressed resonates throughout the passage. Luke delighted in proclaiming that divine salvation was coming to the powerless. Widows, harlots, the grieving, lepers, and cripples found that "today" God was visiting them with the salvation promised long ago. For Theophilus and the other readers, once Gentile "dogs" without hope and outside of the covenant of promise, God's salvation had at last appeared. As a result they too could delight in the wonderful things God had done. Jesus brought the divine blessing of God's kingdom to the truly "poor" of this world.

Everyone is welcome even those who have a "weakened spirit" like the woman in our story.

Reflection and meaning of the reading

Can you imagine yourself being disabled in a society where they reject you because they think you have an evil spirit? Can you imagine how it must feel to be pushed to the side and be ignored all the time?

I can just imagine how frightened she must have been when Jesus called her in the open to come to him. I can just imagine her anxiety realising that He is doing something totally improper in the synagogue on a Sabbath? And to think that Jesus dared to touch her – her, the unclean sinner with the weakened spirit! But I also can just imagine her joy when she realised that she was being healed, transformed as a new person.

It reminded me of a story I once read of this family who stayed in a remote part of the world. They had never been in a city and never been exposed to anything we take for granted. So there they were in this hotel standing in front of a lift wondering what it really was when an older lady approached, pushed the buttons, and climbed in this cage when the doors opened. A few minutes later the doors opened again and a younger lady walked out. They were all amazed. It was then that the father said to his son: Get your mother, and be quick!

I imagine that this explains exactly the transformation that the woman in our story must have felt. To be crippled for your whole life and then to be "normal" must have been quite dramatic! But Jesus saw her – looked at her with mercy, compassion and love. He even touched her – not being

afraid of what anyone would think. His love lifted her out of her tragic state into a new life of new opportunities.

But she realised that it is only God who saved her and joyously praised him. She did not walk away with a sense of this is what life owed her. She walked away as a new person thanking God!

This is really a story of hope for us all. We all are “crippled” by the onslaughts of this world, its selfish values and its shallowness. Yes, we all have experience and still experience how people who are not followers of God often make our lives miserable and sad. We know what it is like to be in a relationship with someone who does not share the same Christian values. We also know how devastating it is to suffer illness, poverty, loneliness, and rejection with no one helping.

We all know how it feels to be the “unwanted sheep in the family”. But Jesus broke the barriers that existed between God and humanity, between different people, and of discrimination when He died on the cross and was resurrected. We have been touched by God’s grace, we can walk away with joy in our hearts or we can be like the leader of the synagogue going through life as if nothing has happened.

We can also erect barriers between us and other people. We can go though life never ever to be out of line – only helping those that the Church agrees with. We can sit on our sofas and talk of all the charities never lifting a finger to do anything ourselves. We can sit and justify every action of love, outreach or charitable event by simply saying: well I have given them money! We can exclude people and shut our eyes and ears to the real needs of people around us.

Or we can be like Jesus:

Accepting and loving everyone just as they are and walking the extra mile!

May we go from here and always do what Jesus did.

Amen