

- 1) We've just heard yet another account of a Jesus healing from Gospel Story-Teller Luke.
Luke tells lots of these, perhaps because, by tradition, he's known as a physician.
Luke records no less than fifteen instances of Jesus healing individuals, one-on-one.
Four accounts of healing each and every hurting person in very large crowds.
And two accounts where Jesus sends out disciples—
first twelve, then seventy—to do the same.
Often, but not always, Jesus releases healing grace by means of a hands-on touch.
Sometimes, not always, Jesus tells those he's healed
that their faith has had a hand in their coming to wholeness.
But there is more in play and at stake, in all these healing stories
than Jesus dispensing temporary doses of palliative care to lucky folks —
who—like all of us—are endemically afflicted with terminal mortality.
Truth be told, if short-lived cures en route to death were all that Jesus was about;
what would be our interest in listening to these stories?
- 2) Luke describes the physiological deformity of, and a medical intervention on
a woman “bent over” for eighteen years.
But the specifics of her diagnosis, and the mechanics of her treatment
are not Luke's deepest interest.
Her condition is symptomatic of sociological, political, and spiritual disease—
diseases in far greater need of healing.
The woman's medical condition is the IMMEDIATE concern of Jesus.
It is not, however, his ULTIMATE concern.
- 3) Luke, as we said, was a physician—according to tradition.
A few weeks ago, Cricket fantasized that, based on how Luke treats women,
Luke might have BEEN a WOMAN.
So, today, I'll make free to suggest that Luke was bi-vocational.
After wrapping up a day job as a physician,
Luke burned midnight oil doing musical composition—
Where did THAT come from?
Luke crafts no less than four songs into the first two chapters of his Gospel—
freedom songs sung by Mary, Zechariah, an Angel choir, and Simeon.
Like the composer of an orchestral fugue, across the full score of his Gospel,
Luke contrapuntally interweaves the themes of Teaching and Touching,
Synagogue and Sabbath, and he does so in conjunction
with a still more fundamental theme: that of Healing and Liberation.
For instance, not once, but twice, Luke tells us that people came to Jesus (quote):
To hear him AND to be healed of their diseases—this repeat is NOT a Lukan memory lapse.
In those teachings that Luke records; again and again Jesus returns to the theme
of healing and liberation—release from bondage in body and spirit—
particularly for those bent double by social structures
that crush and cripple, paralyze and oppress.
Not always, but sometimes Jesus heals on the one day in the week
when, to honor God's own rest after six days of creation work,
everyone must stand down from work and rest as well.
(No bad idea, especially in a work-frenzied culture such as ours.)

But for Jesus, Sabbath not only honors God's delight in creation, as recorded in Genesis.

The Sabbath also embodies God's determination for liberation, as depicted in Exodus.

Of all days, Jesus asserts, the Sabbath is the day of restoration and release.

Not always, but sometimes, Jesus effects these Sabbath healings in synagogues—
places designated as centers for the worship of God, and the study of God's law.

In and out, back and forth, Luke interplays these themes
in lyrical conversation with each other:

Teaching and Touching, Synagogue and Sabbath, Healing and Liberation.

And here—only here—in this one story—Gospel medic/Gospel music maker Luke
has Jesus bring all these themes together in one bold freedom song—
a song of physical, social, political, and spiritual freedom.

- 4) With that background in theological, medical musicology,
the specifics in this story of the bent woman's healing come into focus.

The Greek phrase in Luke's account translated as:

*A woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years
can just as well be translated:*

A woman with a spirit of weakness for eighteen years—

because of which she was (quote) bent over and quite unable to stand up straight.

Beneath the iron social structures of her society, what woman could stand up straight?

Yet, here she is—in the synagogue— on the Sabbath—

not even looking for healing, just looking for a place to pray.

Bent as she is, she can't meet Jesus eye to eye; if she sees him at all, it is only his feet.

But that's not important—Jesus sees her.

He calls her over—in the synagogue—on the Sabbath—and he says to her:

Woman, you are set free of your weakness.

He lays his hands upon her—which, in that culture—as in ours—

is not just a gesture of healing, but also a gesture of blessing.

Indeed, it may just be a healing touch because it is a blessing touch.

And what does she do? She stands up straight and starts praising God.

- 5) *Wait just a minute!* The gatekeepers of sacred time and space protest.

She's been like this for eighteen years; could not this healing wait one more day?

This is the Sabbath, after all!

One more day is one too many! Jesus snaps back, not missing a beat—

This Holy Day is God's High Time; This sacred space is God's chosen place.

*Like all her sisters, this standing-up-straight, God-praising woman
is Abraham's daughter—God's own child.*

The iron grip of social control that has held her down is shattered—

the demonic force that has kept her captive is overthrown—

right here—right now—at this High Time, in this Holy Place.

The full effect of this release will take some time, but she shall not be an isolated case.

She's like a mustard seed, a pinch of yeast, an entry point for the Reign of God—

a reign that—now set loose upon the world—will never ever cease to spread.

These healing, liberating words and acts of Jesus reach back and resonate
with the first sermon he preached back in his hometown of Nazareth:

Good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed.

The year of God's favor—the year of Jubilee—the Sabbath of Sabbaths

*when humanly created infrastructures of social domination are dismantled;
and God's liberating creation is restored.*

And Jesus refuses to rest on any Sabbath until the dawn finally breaks on that Sabbath.

6) Good stories, like good music, don't require explanation.

But in the spaces they create, they do stir imagination.

- How, I wonder, would Luke the Physician diagnose our condition?
- Where in ourselves, in our parish, our community, our culture—
where do we confront—and where do we contribute to—
crippling spirits of weakness
spirits that constrict our vision
and bend folks down beneath their crushing weight?
- How, I wonder, might Luke the Musician
help us find our voices to sing God's freedom song?
- What blessing touches have we received—
blessing/healing touches that release us all
and set us free to stand up straight and give God praise?