

Sermon Proper 16 Year C 8-24/25-19

The Rev. Cheryl P. Moore St. Paul's Church, Concord, NH

Martyr and Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero once said:

A church that does not provoke any crisis, preach a gospel that does not unsettle, proclaim a word of God that does not get under anyone's skin or a word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed: what kind of gospel is that?

In today's portion from Luke we experience the true gospel; Jesus provokes, unsettles, proclaims, reveals the brokenness of our lives, and demonstrates for us who we are called to be just as he was doing for those sitting around him in the synagogue on that long ago Sabbath day.

Like them, we have the background of the Hebrew Bible that taught us about law and liberation, and like them we have the words of the prophets that were to help us understand and discern the meanings relevant to our lives and circumstances.

Today we come to the gospel having heard the Isaiah reading speaking from and for the community trying to rebuild their lives in Jerusalem after their exile. Reminding them of what they have been freed from, they are admonished that it is not enough to just avoid committing acts of injustice and oppression, they must raise the lowly up, feed the hungry, and provide life's necessities for the afflicted.

They are reminded that reconstruction of *their* Jerusalem, their community and their individual lives of faith must be rebuilt on solid foundations of healing personal brokenness and community trust. God has given the people guidelines for supporting one another and living in an equitably sustainable community. Yet it is slow going and people are frustrated.

"God's demands are clear, but their anxious desires to secure their own lives, even when it requires that others suffer, makes obedience to God's expectations challenging." (Brian Jones)

And so we come to the days of Jesus mission to bring the understanding of God's covenant and promise more clearly to the people. He was not turning away from the God of Creation, the God of Israel and the Prophets but bringing that God more fully to the people, and embodying the mission and promise of God through his own life.

He is doing what a good Jew would have been doing at that time, and he is obviously accepted enough to be at the center of things in the synagogue teaching. In this and

other instances Jesus interrupts his teaching to heal. Luke doesn't even give us an idea about what Jesus was saying there in the middle of the synagogue with all those people gathered around him. Luke is more concerned about Jesus self-interruption and the actions and conflict that follows.

This is what happens:

First Jesus sees: he sees the hurts and the negative spirits of the community in a woman, bent over so fully that her eyes can only see her own feet and where they are stepping, she can look no one in the eye nor can they look at her.

Then Jesus calls: he invites her from the margins, from where she is unseen by the majority. She is given a place in the heart, the center of the congregation and the community. He does hide what he is doing in another room.

Then Jesus speaks: he respects her as he addresses her as Woman, and Daughter of Abraham giving her an identity and status in the community and a place in the tradition.

Then Jesus acts: Simply, with no drama or flourishes. His words are a simple statement of truth. His movement a simple touch of his hand. "Woman you are set free."

Jesus sees with compassion; calls with open heart; speaks with respect; and acts grounded in the healing righteousness of God's love and will.

No pyrotechnics or descending clouds or dramatic noises. Just a restoration to wholeness.

Her response: It says immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But there is more to it than that. This, my friends is why we read all the commentaries and scholars observations.

The language for 'she stood up straight' actually has the meaning of she was drawn up straight by the action of someone lifting her, meaning God has lifted her up.

And the language for 'she began praising God' is an imperfect tense which indicates that it was not a single praising in the moment of time but a linear ongoing praising over time into the future.

What a fabulous thing to have happen! Yes? No!

Luke brings us right to the conflict which is the key to this story.

Why did Jesus do this right now? Why did the Synagogue Leader have a melt down?

Let's step aside to look a bit at the idea of Sabbath. Most of us remember the Genesis story of God creating for 6 days and then resting on the 7th. As kids you might have

had the image of God putting his (of course it was HIS) feet up on a cloud, and drinking some celestial potion and taking a well deserved break looking at all the wonderful things he created and the great job he had done.

And many of you may be familiar with all the conflict over the centuries in both scripture and history about keeping the Sabbath, both religious and civic. Those of us who have been around for a while remember when it wasn't possible to go shopping on Sunday, or in some places, even out to eat at a restaurant. There have been conflicts about the Sabbath ever since it was first instituted.

While we remember the Genesis idea of resting on the 7th day most of us don't make a connection to the dimension of Sabbath that is central to its meaning.

The Sabbath tradition which dates from the Exodus is that the Sabbath is the day when the people were liberated from bondage and the rest and renewal of that day is and was the celebration of freedom and the joy of being together and free, not simply a break from daily duties. Sabbath began as a day of gathering and remembering the journey and praise and giving thanks.

It was not as it became over the years a time devoted to shoulds and musts and obligations about who could participate, and what must and must not be done.

So in the synagogue on this Sabbath day that Luke is telling us about, the nature of Sabbath is central to the conflict.

For the Synagogue Leader - the 'ought' of the Sabbath was to the obligation, the divine necessity to work on 6 days and not on the 7th at all in any way. Exceptions to the rule undermined the foundation of all God asked of them.

The synagogue leader is genuine and intends the best, if Jesus is healing on the Sabbath then he must not be from God. The rules are there for a reason. His agitation is indicative of his fear of what might transpire if the laws are trespassed.

For Jesus - the 'ought' of the Sabbath was to the obligation, the divine necessity to free the woman from bondage to celebrate and continue God's liberation of the people.

In this public act of healing Jesus is taking on more than the healing of this woman he is taking on the cause of her suffering, the system, the practices, the beliefs that allow the community and the harmful spirits and moods of the culture that create and maintain her suffering. Jesus was not about undoing the Law. Jesus was about putting the law into its proper place.

The teaching here is that the Law is in service of God's will not superseding it. The law is a structure of support not a prison with unbending bars. It is a boundary for safety and not a locked gate that doesn't permit us to pass for any reason.

These verses tell us that the *slightest delay* in healing indicates resistance to Jesus Kingdom mission and message.

Jesus never waits for a more appropriate moment or day to act. It is never too soon for freedom and healing. It is never too soon to right a wrong.

Jesus teaches us that the time is always now.

If the time is now and it is never too soon what does that say about God's expectations about each of us. What does our response say about the kind of community we want to be.

What would it require for our souls to be liberated and act as liberators for others so that we may be fully at rest in God? It would take approaching the reality of the world around us with intention and faith.

In our community today we have many stories of people and souls in bondage. Here are a few taken from today's news-

Remember that Ice raid a few weeks ago that put 600 people in jail, so far 40 people have been charged. And not one of them was a plant owner, or officer. Yes, there are problems with immigration. The system is broken.

And again. A man, a long time legal resident of the United States, goes to Bermuda every year to visit his mother, brings home honey every year from the neighborhood farm. When his plane lands he is arrested at the airport on Federal charges for transporting drugs with the intent to sell, is jailed, ICE gets involved and begins deportation process, 82days later he is completely exonerated because he was bringing home honey. He lost his jobs, his family their income, his children were traumatized, and all this because of a system that chooses the harshest option without regard for the truth. Why so long? Well they didn't actually have a system that could test honey to see if it really was liquid meth. So, they had to keep trying over and over to find the drugs that weren't there.

If we don't deal with a system that is this broken, it won't be there to help and support and guide us when we need it.

This morning I saw a headline. It said 'Homeless in LA are breaking open water hydrants to fill water balloons!' Well, actually, the homeless were opening hydrants on days that were over 100 degrees when there was no water at all for them to drink, to clean themselves and their possessions, no water simply to survive. Of course it is critical that the hydrants are working for those neighborhoods and many others. The Mayor's admonition to the fire department to find a way to make the hydrants harder to break into solves the hydrant problem but not the broken system. Los Angeles is the land of huge tanker trucks regularly delivering water by the gallons to fill swimming pools. Why

is there no one to deliver water to the homeless? Then they wouldn't be driven to break into the only source of water for blocks around.

Isaiah and Luke teach us that we must be diligent individually and as a community to recognize what theological, political, social and cultural ideas we hold dear that disallow full participation from others. We must take on the cause of suffering, the system, the practices, the beliefs that allow the community to let the children, the poor, the broken, the stranger, the other keep suffering. Jesus was not about undoing the Law. Jesus was about putting the law into its proper place.

The guidance we have from faith leaders of today is clear:

Bishop Michael Curry: "does the policy treat people with love, acknowledging our common humanity? If the answer is no, it is not a Christian solution."

The Statement of the National Cathedral Staff: "Violent words lead to violent actions. When does silence become complicity? What will it take for us all to say, with one voice, that we have had enough? The question is less about the president's sense of decency, but of ours."

From the statement of conscience of theologians, clergy and religious scholars as published in Commonweal "We reject the xenophobia and racism of many forms of ethno-nationalism, explicit and implicit, as grave sins against God the Creator. Violence done against the bodies of marginalized people is violence done against the body of Christ. Indifference to the suffering of orphans, refugees, and prisoners is indifference to Jesus Christ and his cross. White supremacist ideology is the work of the anti-Christ."

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist."

– Dom Helder Camara, [Dom Helder Camara: Essential Writings](#)

Following Jesus we too must See, Call, Speak, Act....Now

For as St. John of the Cross says; "In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone."

Amen.