

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 13:10-17

Our Gospel reading from Luke today is all about being set free.

A woman came to Jesus. She was imprisoned by a crippled body. For eighteen years she was imprisoned by this ailment, she had not been able to straighten up. Then Jesus said, “You are set free from your ailment”. She straightened up. She could go about her life free of the discomfort and pain created by her ailment. She praised God, she was free at last!

However, not everyone was happy about this healing miracle by Jesus. The religious leaders were very upset. The Bible says not to work on the Sabbath. Healing was defined as work. The laws of the Pharisees said that healing was allowed on the Sabbath only if a person’s life was in danger. The woman’s life was not in danger, so couldn’t Jesus have made an appointment to heal the woman when the Sabbath was over? It was only a matter of hours before sunset and the official end of the Sabbath. Jesus’ response to the religious leaders is the heart of this story.

First, Jesus calls the religious leaders hypocrites, they pretended to honour God, but they were really just serving the law.

Here is the hypocrisy. If the religious leaders had really been serving God, they would have realized that mercy is greater than sacrifice. They would have rejoiced that a child of God was set free. But they were too busy worshipping the written laws, and so they complained that the Sabbath had been broken, instead of rejoicing that the woman was set free.

A lot of Christians have trouble believing that Jesus still sets

people free today, just as He set that woman free. Most Christians would say that they believe that Jesus healed a woman almost 2,000 years ago, however, many of those same people have trouble believing that He still does that today.

Maybe the reason for this is because of the healthy skepticism we have about faith healers. We have all heard of, or seen, so called faith healers on TV that are really pretenders. Most of them are just actors, hypocrites, who pretend to be healers, and take advantage of people in pain and misery. There are true faith healers who set people free through faith in Christ. It is healthy to be sceptical of modern day wonder workers, but that is no reason to doubt the power of the Son of God to work wonders through those whom He chooses as His instruments of healing. If we doubt that Jesus can set people free today, are we not just as much hypocrites as those who told Jesus not to heal on the Sabbath. We say we believe that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead back in the first century. We say we believe that He rose from the dead and is still alive. We say that we believe that He is here with us by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we truly believe all these things, then why do some Christians have trouble believing that He can still heal and set people free as He did back then? Are we just pretending to believe that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead and is alive with us? Are we like the religious leaders in Jesus' day who only pretended to believe in and serve God?

They were hypocrites for pretending to serve God, and then telling Jesus not to heal on God's holy day. If we deny that Jesus has power to heal and set free, then we are hypocrites too.

We are pretenders who say we believe in the power of God, but who are really putting our trust elsewhere. Like the religious leaders who said, "Jesus, you can't heal on the Sabbath" we are

saying in our hearts, “Jesus, you can’t heal today. Jesus told the woman with the crippled body, “You ARE set free!” And He is here today to tell us that we are set free! The work has already been done to set us free. Jesus Christ paid the price at Calvary and we are set free. What is it that we need to be set free from? Is it heartache and emotional pain? Is it physical limitations? We might say, “Well when we all get to heaven we will be free?” We believe whole heartedly that when we get to heaven, we will be freed from all that shackles and imprisons the human body, mind and soul. That is our future hope, but we’re talking about here and now. We are saying that, as Christians, the power to set us free is already here, by the presence of Christ in our hearts.

Something needs to be made quite clear here. When we say Jesus can heal us, we don’t necessarily mean he will cure us.

Curing is just one of many options God has for healing us.

Curing means the physical ailment is gone. Healing means something much deeper and broader. There have been people who were cured of a disease, who were not healed. The cancer or whatever was gone, but they were still suffering from it emotionally and spiritually. There have also been people who were not cured, but they were healed.

A true story told by an Anglican Priest to illustrate this point about a person being healed, but not cured. “I was ministering to a lady who was dying of cancer. I visited her many times and always prayed with her. Her sister would be there often and would kneel beside her with me to pray. While praying one night I was convicted to pray for healing for this lady and I did.

Her sister became really upset with me afterward claiming I was giving her sister false hope. I explained to them that there are many kinds of healing, that are not necessarily physical.

The next time I visited, the lady that was dying thanked me for the healing prayer. She explained that a brother, who had not spoken to the sisters for twenty-five years over some petty family dispute, had called the next day and wanted to come visit.

He apologized for his stubbornness and asked forgiveness. The healing God desired for this lady was the healing of the rift in her family. The healing in that family prepared them for the accidental death of the brothers' son a little while later, and it still continues to this day".

Never forget that Jesus promised to be with us until the end of the age. Jesus is here today just as He was in that synagogue back in the first century. The problem, is many people don't know it. We ARE set free from sin, from worry, from aloneness.

Believe in the power of Christ to make us free, and live the freedom God has already given us in Christ Jesus!

AMEN.