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Iglesia del Pacto - Eagle Rock
Luke 13:10-17

Let us read the Word of the Lord:

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day."

¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?"

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

The Word of the Lord

At this point in the book of Luke, Jesus preaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath has become a common occurrence. And yet I imagine there was still a bit of tension in the air on this occasion...after all when you have a guest preacher there can be a mix of excitement and fear [pause]. You get to hear from someone different, you wonder if their words will bring joy, you hope to learn something new, and at the same time you are slow to fully embrace their words, slow to trust...just in case their words and actions disagree with your ways of thinking and challenge your ways of being.

If you've read the book of Luke you know that unspoken tensions quickly turn into noisy, sometimes violent, disturbances when it is Jesus who is teaching in a synagogue. His presence, his words, his actions cause disruption and discomfort among many of those who gather to hear him teach. The good news he offers is offensive to some.

So, what is unique or special about this particular scene in the synagogue? Is it the presence of the crippled woman? Is it Jesus' reaction to the woman? Or is it the synagogue leader's response? I'm not so sure there is something unique or special in these verses as much as I am convicted that they are a concrete manifestation, a witness to Jesus' mission...this scene reveals how the Word of God impacts the lives of real people and how it should reshape institutional practices and beliefs. This story invites us to consider how God's mission should transform our own ways of being in this world, our practices and actions, the concrete ways our convictions/beliefs unfold in the ordinariness of life. So how do we go about discerning these new ways?

I think it is Jesus' own words, in his first synagogue appearance in chapter 4, that can best

assist us in reading and interpreting this scene...so that our minds, hearts, and practices might continue to become aligned with God's mission and Kin-dom. You might recall that when handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah Jesus announced his ministry and mission when he read:

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¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

It is through this scriptural reference and missional perspective that in chapter 13 Luke presents us a nameless woman, lacking a professional title, her credentials are omitted. To be unnamed is to live in the shadows, unseen, to be considered unimportant enough for people to bother remembering your name, to be unnamed is to live on the margins of society, it is to be recognized primarily by what you lack...you are poor (meaning you lack economic stability), you are an inmate (your freedom and rights are constrained), you are crippled (your mobility and access are limited), you are **undocumented (you do not belong...and your inclusion is dependent on a piece of paper)**.

We may not have a name for this woman but we are offered the reason for her namelessness. She has been crippled for eighteen years, for eighteen years an illness has ravaged her body, causing a visible effect, she is bent over, she is unable to stand up straight. Nevertheless, the diagnosis or the reason for her illness, according to Luke, is caused by a Spirit. This is because to only attribute her crippled state to a physical infirmity would be to ignore the effects an oppressive system can have on one's body. Her curvature is an outward expression of an internal ailment but is also a visible statement about the effects of being marginalized and ignored by an oppressive system. She is bent over because of the weight and pain caused by those who refuse to name her, recognize her, welcome her. Luke's description of this woman's physical state serves as a metaphor that reveals her social position. Her illness has not only had an effect on her body, it has also affected her social standing. Being sick, visibly bent over, for eighteen years ends up affecting relationships, it impacts one's ability to participate in certain activities that often result in relational bonds and lifelong friendships. Exclusion impedes one's ability to progress within the stated and unstated norms our society maintains. You are excluded because you are considered different or foreign.

Thankfully God does not separate the physical from the spiritual. This crippled immigrant woman's illness is caused by a spirit because it represents a cosmological disorder. Things in this world are not as they ought to be. Our bodies succumb to decay...that was not God's plan. The laws of the land are not applied equally across racial groups. It is brown and black bodies that apparently are in most need of “correcting” and policing. Education is touted as a universal right, a key to a better future...yet some are able to buy access to the rooms where privileged minds are housed while others are housed in overcrowded rooms. The road to becoming a citizen in this country is an illegible map of endless paperwork and policies often easily navigated by those who can pay expert cartographers. You are granted refuge or asylum if your suffering is deemed worthy...all the while ignoring the root causes that have wreaked havoc in your country of origin. Wealth and whiteness at times inadvertently and at other times more explicitly work as facilitators of access and inclusion. Things are not as they ought to be. Some of us know what it means to be unseen, **to be undocumented, to be an immigrant, to be**

looked over, to be marginalized by real people—whether they do it knowingly or because they are hypnotized by the status quo. You know what it feels like to be invisible. You exist, you make meaningful contributions to your trade, your bodies carry the marks of your hard work...but you remain invisible/overlooked. Some of us have to make ourselves invisible to survive...our invisibility is a curse and yet it offers protection. Our society,

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our laws dictate that the worth of many of those who attend Iglesia del Pacto, your family in Christ, is not found in their humanity...no these laws reduce their worth to a piece of paper. Our dinner tables overflow with produce picked by **undocumented** hands but once our bodies have gorged the harvest...we deport them. Are you properly documented or not? That's what matters. Friends this is the illness we carry as a community...those who are **immigrants**...these cosmic disorders affect all of us and if left unchecked, unchallenged their weight becomes so heavy, so unbearable that it deforms our bodies and souls.

But what a beautiful and glorious thing it is that God does not separate the need for healing from the need for liberation. It says that: Jesus saw her! Jesus sees us! This woman might have been out of place at the synagogue, she might not have belonged. But out of all the people there...it is her that Jesus sees and calls! No one is invisible for God! She was not invisible, you are not invisible! Jesus chose to see and speak to the crippled immigrant woman, not to those who held lofty titles, credentials or male bodies. **When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."**

Jesus saw, called, and set the woman free. But he drew closer...laying his hands on her he liberated her from the oppressive chains of neglect and separation and welcomed her into the community.

Immediately she stood up and began praising God. Her praise serving as a witness that God's word is effective, that Jesus' mission was unfolding in their presence. It is Jesus' compassion that moves him to call her over. He is the one who initiates the encounter. By calling her over he is removing her cloak of invisibility and making her the focal point of this story. To call this woman of little social standing, to free her of her ailment symbolizes her restoration into the community. She is no longer "the bent over woman," "the crippled lady," that people avoid eye contact with or cross to the other side of the street when they see her, she is no longer the sick woman, the invisible woman, the immigrant woman. She has been healed physically and socially. **She has been liberated from her captivity!** It is here where we find our hope. Jesus sees us and calls us. He is not waiting for us to go to him...God has already initiated the encounter; sending Jesus to bring good news to the poor, to liberate the captives, to heal the blind and to free the oppressed. Your ailment, your gender, your lack of an academic degree, your **undocumentedness**, your queerness, that which places you outside the "acceptable norms" are not a barrier for God's unending inclusive love. [Pause]

But the scene does not end there...and this is what I really love about this story...that it does not allow us to romanticize the effects of welcoming the stranger...it provides us a concrete glimpse into what it means to stand with the marginalized. It does not allow us to be naïve. As my friend Andre Henry says, "One does not simply run out to confront the powers that be on a whim." Because as these passages show us, when we resist the allure of exclusionary tales and practice kin-dom values **we will** encounter opposition.

The woman's liberation caused the synagogue leader to raise his voice in protest. Because Jesus was not following the established protocol. While the religious leader's protest resists Jesus's

radical inclusivity we should be careful not to demonize him...his argument is not a simple self-serving trop. Maintaining the Sabbath day was a God given commandment, a practice that set them apart as the people of God, those who served Yahweh. This is why the religious leader does not offer an interpretation of the command or quote the scriptural text (DT

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5:13) when confronting Jesus. He assumes that it is the divine will to maintain the Sabbath. He is being faithful by ensuring that the people of God live in accordance to the law. Similarly, today we hear and meet people whose job is to uphold a law or a system that they had no role in establishing. But to sustain the status quo without critically engaging and reflecting on the ways that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are at work is to dishonor God's authority. Faith filled ignorance does not let you off the hook?

This is why Luke records that it was the "Lord" who responded. The term "Lord," underscores the authority Jesus merits in this conversation. It establishes Jesus' authority over the people of God. And while the synagogue leader had assumed he understood the divine will, Jesus responds as the divine interpreter. Jesus reminds them that the passage from Deuteronomy they are touting to prohibit his healing work applies not only to humans but to animals as well. How is it they are at peace when tending to their animals on the Sabbath but outraged when it's their neighbor's noose that is loosened so that she may drink living water? Their faithful intentions have ignored, lost sight of, the law's deeper meaning. This is why they are hypocrites.

Hypocrites are those who ignore the thousands of innocent lives captive in for profit **immigration detention centers**...a system created to provide protection and safety, that "slowly" and "innocently" has become a web of wealth too big to suddenly shutdown. Hypocrites are those who support building walls to keep away families fleeing violence and poverty but then spend thousands on mission trips to the very countries these families are fleeing. According to Jesus this type of religious hypocrisy ignores the crippled [**immigrant**] woman, over time unquestioned practices have become complicit in the building systems of oppression, and thus they/us have missed the point of God's command.

This woman, **immigrant** women, all **immigrants, are children** of Abraham, they are human! Clearly the president of this country ignored the Word of God on Friday when he said asylum seekers animals not people. This type of vile language incites violence and brings death. As those who claim allegiance to Christ we must denounce this type of hateful speech—privately AND PUBLICLY. **Asylum seekers, immigrants**, deserve to be set free from their bondage no matter what country they are coming from or what day of the week it is!

This is the good news we proclaim! A life-giving message! That welcomes the crippled, nameless, **immigrant** woman, that for years carried in her body the shame and pain of invisibility for something she had little control over. This is the Lord we serve, one who reminds us that God's hospitality defies our narrow biblical interpretations and legal applications. We serve a God who confronts the powerful, telling them that their laws ignore God's justice, that their words ignore God's creation...because everyone is created in the image of God.

So, may we all work together to extend the same compassion, mercy, and justice that Jesus extended, as we welcome **immigrants** and those society pushes aside into our communities. Because it is in these seemingly small acts that God's kin-dom makes itself visible in the present.

And today, like those gathered at the synagogue, we get to join a liberated woman in praising God! Our sister, Sandra, whose journey is not complete, but she has already

experienced our Lord's compassion and liberation.

Let us pray: Señor esta tarde nos arrepentimos de la forma en que hemos sido partícipes y cómplices de sistemas en nuestra sociedad que excluyen y oprimen a tus hijos y a tus hijas negándoles la gracia, el amor y la libertad que tú quieres para cada uno de ellos. Señor te

pedimos que nos libres de los sistemas que nos oprimen, excluyen y deshumanizan. Ayúdanos a todos y todas a unirnos en tu misión de incluir al mundo entero en tu plan salvífico. Gracias Jesús por qué tu vida, muerte y resurrección nos dan la certeza de que tu misión se cumplió y continúe cumpliendo. Permítenos hoy experimentar tu perdón que nos consuela y tu gracia que nos revive.

En el nombre del padre, del hijo y del Espíritu Santo. Amen.

“To the love stranger as oneself is to live as part of a community where human dignity is affirmed and where loving one's neighbor is exercised in mutual responsibility. In light of this, sojourners are to be treated justly, protected from oppression, and, where they are poor and vulnerable, given comfort and support. The love of the stranger is to be fleshed out daily in homes, church congregations, communities, and at the national level.”

- Fleur Houston in “ You Shall the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees, and Asylum”