

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, August 24, 2025

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Let us pray. Gracious and Loving Spirit, you are as close as our very next breath. And so we give you thanks for your presence amongst us and within us this day. And we pray that in this moment by your power you might quiet any voice within us but your own, that we might hear your word for us this day, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We continue in this month of August as we move through the lectionary together. We are again this morning in the Gospel according to Luke, this time the 13th chapter. We're going to read together verses 1-17. You can follow along in your own Bible or in one of the pew Bibles. Luke 13, verses 10-17. Let us listen together for the word that God has to speak to each of us and indeed to the church.

*Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years. She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 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." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox and his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day. And when Jesus said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So we have this story, this vision of Jesus on a day just like this one, on a day when the people of God have gathered together. He is teaching, probably not from a music stand turned lectern, right? You imagine he's committed everything to memory. He is our Lord. He might have been moving around a bit. He might not have been standing in a pulpit, right? And he's teaching, and he's opening to them as he does in other parts of scripture. The way it's described is 'he is opening to these people the word of God.' And in the midst of this, he sees this woman come in and he sees her hunched over. And you can imagine that he had a choice in that moment. If you've spent a good amount of time public speaking, if you've ever spoken here in front of the congregation of Idlewild, you know that there are often distractions. Sometimes there are

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ambulances or the fire department going down Union as there were about 30 seconds ago, right? Sometimes there are restless children, right? There are, sometimes, there are crying babies. Sometimes someone has a health event. Sometimes there are loud noises that could distract— a hymnal falling to the ground. Right? It's always interesting the way you acknowledge or don't acknowledge the potential distraction as someone who's speaking publicly. Okay? If it's a siren going down Union, we're not going to interrupt ourselves, right? We're used to it, right? If y'all can't hear it online, there's another one, right? Yeah, we're used to that. Okay. If it's a child who's...who's moving around a little bit, we actually welcome that. A baby crying tells us there's new life in our midst, right? We don't stare at the young parent down the pew from us, as if to say with our eyes, "Hush that child." Right? We don't do that. We smile. We smile and we think to ourselves, it is good to have that sort of distraction. You imagine Jesus had a choice, too. Do I draw attention to this woman, or do I just keep on going with my teaching? Maybe they didn't notice her come in. Maybe he was just about to get to the main crux of his lesson, right? Just at the time when he was going to reveal that particular divine truth.

And so there's something for us to pay attention to in the attentiveness of our Lord in that moment. Jesus, scripture tells us, sees the woman. Verse 12. "When Jesus saw her, he called her over." Jesus sees the woman hunched over as she is making her way into the space. He doesn't wait for others to see her. He notices her. And he doesn't simply say, "Come in. You're welcome." He says, "Come here. Come to me." The first lesson of this text is the attentiveness of Jesus in this moment. But once he calls her over, that's not the purpose of him calling her over. The purpose is to do something in her life. Verse 12 continues. Jesus said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment. And then he laid his hand upon her and immediately she stood up straight." With a word, Jesus heals.

And sometimes that's how healing works. Sometimes we draw close to our Lord, and sometimes it is but a word and a touch that can heal us. It's worth us paying attention to that, too. If we claim to be indeed the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the world, the body that is Christ here and now, sometimes it is a word, and sometimes it is a gentle touch that can make one stand up straight after being hunched over for 18 years.

And when that happens and when the woman stands up straight, what does she do? Verse 13 says, "She began praising God." Immediately began praising God. We don't know exactly what that praise sounded like, what it looked like, what posture it took. What we might imagine is that moments before there was a group of people listening intently to this young rabbi, and then something happens and all of a sudden there is a ruckus, right? She has been healed and she is so deeply grateful that the only appropriate response is praise.

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YouTube has their ways of figuring out your algorithm. So, y'all don't think too much about the story I'm about to tell you, okay? But, a while ago, let's say a year ago, into my algorithm came chiropractors, okay? Specifically, it was after I had gone and seen my chiropractor back in Georgia. (Our phones don't listen to us, though. It's all good.) And so I started seeing these YouTube videos of chiropractors. and it was...and there's something called the ringdinger. Okay. Has anybody ever heard of this? Good. I get...oh, we got one. Okay. Then I get to...we get to educate y'all. Go home YouTube ringdinger. Okay. And what you're going to see is people going for chiropractic adjustments who have had ailments for years and years and years and years. And it's kind of scary to watch, right? But you see the chiropractor put this person onto the table and they do this...all this sort of stuff and then they make an adjustment. And this adjustment is pretty sudden. It's pretty scary. And you kind of have to wait for a second to see what the result of the adjustment is going to be. And more often than not, this person having just received an adjustment will sit there in awe for three or four or five seconds, right? And then they'll begin to cry or laugh or make a noise, an in, you know, indescribable noise. And then these videos all end, they're like 60 seconds. They all end with—and I know they're curated. I got it, right? But they all end with this person walking the length of the office of this doctor. And what's amazing to me is we get a window into seeing someone healed for them, right? This isn't an advertisement for chiropractics, right? Some of you are like, "I don't like that. I don't like that he's talking about that." My mother would feel the same way. All right, no worries. She's not too happy. It's not about that. Do you get it? It's about them walking in a new way, upright. It's about the healing that they experienced. You might not understand it. You might not even know where it comes from, right? But what you can see in a short 60-second clip is someone who was stricken and then someone who isn't anymore.

And more often than not, when someone is stricken and then they are not anymore stricken, the response is joy.

And we as Christians, we might say “there is joy born of the spirit of God.” And it might come out as a “praise the Lord,” right? “Praise the Lord. I was stricken, hunched over 18 years, and now I'm walking up and down the aisle of the synagogue,” and there is no appropriate response other than praising God, and everyone rejoices. But if you're not in the chiropractor, that's fine. There's...if you've ever sat across a dinner table or a coffee table with someone who has gone to their first AA meeting and begun to work the steps, right? And they know it's just a day at a time, but they know that they have been stricken with something for maybe a much shorter period than 18 years, but maybe 18 years, right? And then they're telling you about their journey through AA or NA or even Al-Anon, and they start talking to you about how they were moving through the

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world in one particular way and now they're moving in a different way. It will be...you will be hard pressed to find someone who, even in acknowledging how difficult that journey is, is not also joyful for the new life that they have been given, that they are working those steps toward.

They might say that they are joyful, and we might say that's praise. If you sat across the coffee table from—like a friend of mine did just a couple weeks ago—she had a coffee set with a young lady, and about an hour before that coffee was to take place, she got an email. And the young lady in this email to my pastor friend says, "Uh, listen. What I want to talk about is my sexuality. But here's the thing. You're like the fifth pastor I've asked for coffee with. And if you're going to tell me the same thing I've heard from the other pastors, I'd much rather us skip the coffee. Uh if you're going to tell me that I'm not welcome, I'm not loved, I'm not accepted just as I am, then we can skip the time across table from each other." My friend talked about how she felt so grateful that she was able to respond to this young woman. "We need to have coffee because I have a different bit of news to share with you that's going to be good in a different way." And she talks about sitting across the coffee table, and this woman was not hunched over. She was...she was proud of who she was, right? But there was still a posture that she was able to take in hearing that she was indeed beloved. And they ended with prayer and a few tears and smiles. They ended that coffee. If you've ever sat across from somebody who's been told they are not loved, they are not welcome, they are not accepted, and then you tell them, "In fact, all of that's a lie," you are, then maybe you know a bit of what this woman and Jesus, what their interaction is like in this moment. And everyone who has experienced someone who has been healed, everyone who has sat across from somebody who's working the steps of AA or NA or Al-Anon, anyone who has been able to tell someone, in fact, you are beloved in the sight of your creator, anyone when being faced with that reality would rejoice. Amen.

Not everyone. That's not the story that we read in Luke. Everyone except for those who have memorized the scriptures. Everyone except for those who have set the table. Everyone except for those who wear these sorts of things, right? Everyone except for those who consider themselves perfectly religious. That's what the leader of the synagogue represents for us in this text. Everyone rejoices except him. But the leader of the synagogue, this is verse 14, indignant, indignant, because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, keeps saying to the crowd or kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be cured, not on the Sabbath day."

Some people prefer rules over results. Some people resent the liberation of others because they've never felt free themselves. Some people...some people see the liberation, the freedom, the healing that takes place in others in a way that makes them indignant. Perhaps because it

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exposes their own bondage. You get sober and suddenly your friends don't want to socialize with you. You stop gossiping, and suddenly you don't have anything to talk about with that person at work or in the pew.

Sometimes we are liberated, and that is not greeted with joy and praise. People can be okay with healing, but they don't want it to interfere with their comfort or their routine. Let's be affirming but not really talk about it, right? I want people to come to church. I want to welcome them but just not in my seat. Oo, that one hit. Sorry. Yeah, just not where I am. There's a lot of space right here. That's where they should go. Right.

In response to the indignation of the synagogue leader, what does Jesus do? In verse 15, "But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites.'" Interesting. He didn't say, "You hypocrite." What he knew is that that synagogue leader was representative of a bigger group of people, right? And so he uses a plural here. You and you and you, you hypocrites. "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox and his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" Jesus is really, really clear here. He is about the work of healing, about the work of liberation. And it does not matter what your schedule is. It does not matter what your calendar says.

In one fell swoop, he allows her ailment to interrupt his lesson, and he shows a different sort of lesson—that his work ultimately is to liberate us and indeed the whole world. He will show this lesson again not too long from now in the Gospel according to Luke. He will show it again ultimately on the cross. this symbol of the fracturing, the breaking of sin and its power in the world. He will liberate us there, but he will liberate us here as well. He doesn't need to wait for that time to be about the work, because Jesus is in the business of healing and liberation. And I wonder if sometimes we forget that. I wonder if we forget the power of the living God that is working in us and around us, that desires for us to experience deep and abiding freedom. Freedom maybe from addiction or maybe grief or maybe anger.

Freedom from a construct of what it means to be Christian that was never really true to begin with. Right? Because the truth is God has always been about the work of healing and liberation. This is the last point. We're coming to a conclusion. God has always been about the work of healing and liberation. And that's why it's particularly important for us to see that Jesus does his healing on the Sabbath day. The leader of the synagogue thinks the Sabbath day is not for any work. And he's forgotten why the Sabbath was created. The Sabbath was created by our God ???commanded for us to observe, to liberate us, to liberate the world from producing and

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overidentifying ourselves as producers. that we are what we do, to liberate us from our schedules, our calendars, our shoulds. Right? The Sabbath itself is an interruption to liberate us. An interruption for liberation. There's no other day that he should have done this healing on. That's what he says. There's no more appropriate day. Y'all have forgotten what this day is about. This day isn't about pomp and circumstance. It's not even necessarily about the lesson that we were sharing just a few minutes ago, right? It's about you being reminded that God wants you to be liberated and free from those things of the world. Yeah.

That's who you were created to be. To be, to abide, not to do.

I wonder for us this morning, the Gospel of Luke. I wonder, for us, if we can be reminded of the liberating power of our God. I do not know what it is that you are bound up by, right? I'm not sure. I do not know what someone that you deeply love is bound up by. I know a little bit about the things that are binding our world right now. And that's all. Right. But what I do know is that the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus has come that we might know liberation and freedom. We might know it deeply within ourselves and that we also might know that we have been liberated so that we might also become liberators—the hands and the feet of Jesus Christ in the world. I wonder if that's at least a small part of why Jesus decided to pay attention to that distraction, to remind people that it's not a distraction. She's not a distraction. She's a beloved child of the most high God who deserves to stand up straight.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.