

14th Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
August 21st, 2016

It all ends tonight. Over two week ago the Olympic flame entered Rio and opened our eyes to green pool waters and worldwide fears of Zika. Tonight, however, that caldron goes dark. During this brief illumination, I've been struck by the variety of athletic postures, as in the ways the athletes use their bodies. Divers, boxers, archers, and weight lifters all posture differently. One posture expert writes that gymnastics postures involve a lot of unnatural sways, and swimmers sometimes fight their primal posture by rounding their spine. When a swimmer repeatedly arches, or sways, when coming up for air this stresses the lower back, puts the spine at risk for serious injury, and it dampens the power of the swimmers stroke.¹ You see, posture is important to the Olympians, and posture is the focus of today's Gospel.

The healing of a "bent over" woman on the Sabbath is a story unique to Luke. For eighteen years she was hunched and unable to straighten herself. For eighteen years, this unnamed woman strained to see the sun. For eighteen years she became accustomed to looking downward. For eighteen years her world was one of turning from side to side to

¹ <https://gokhalemethod.com/blog/61980>

see those who stood upright. Eighteen years. It's no wonder that she never asked Jesus for healing and no one asked him on her behalf. After all, it had been eighteen years.²

In the big scheme of things eighteen years is nothing, though. Thirteen hundred years, that's something. About thirteen hundred years before Jesus, tradition holds that Moses received the "oral Torah" on Mount Sinai. For thirteen hundred years "right" rules about the Sabbath dominated the synagogue. For thirteen hundred years rabbis argued about what this law means and how it protects us to create order. I don't believe that the religious leaders in today's text are as evil as we make them out to be. In fact, I think they're just as twisted as the unnamed woman. Over thirteen hundred years the religious institution had forgotten that the Sabbath is about abundant life, and abundant life, as Jesus sees it, is "fulfilled not by forbidding works of compassion, but by encouraging them."³ As theologian David Lose puts it, "The law is God's gift to help us live into God's dream that all persons would be treated with love and respect, that all people would grow up with a robust measure of dignity, that all persons would have enough to eat and a safe place to live."⁴

It's easy to judge this woman and those religious leaders too harshly and fall into our own self-righteousness. Let's face it: we are just as warped as they are. We hunch over computers and smart phones aiming our body at the ground. We turn away from other out of fear because of their gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age, race, income status,

² Townes, Emiie M. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: *Feasting on the Word*. "Luke13:10-17: Theological Perspective."

³ *The New Jerome Bible Commentary* pg 705.

⁴ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/08/pentecost-14-c-dream-tenders/>

political party, inability, or belief system. We grasp onto things of this world tightly bringing them in towards ourselves, so that we will have enough money, enough time, enough possessions, and enough value. Our self-doubt and insecurities weigh us down so much that we find ourselves contorted by depression, anxiety, and hypocrisy. We, as a people, are warped by our lack of self-esteem and our unrighteous self-absorption, and we are unable to free ourselves, unable to see the fullness of the world, and unable to see the gift of the law. We are crooked people.

Then “Jesus *saw* the woman, he *called* her over and said, ‘You *are* now well.’ He *placed* his hands on her, and *right away* she stood up straight and *praised* God.” (Luke 13: 12-13 CEV, emphasis mine) I appreciate this translation of Luke where Jesus said, “You are now well.” Jesus spoke a healing word. Jesus gave her a blessing. Jesus spoke something into existence. Then Jesus took a close posture as he laid hands on her. Jesus honored her, included her, acknowledged her, and invited her. Jesus responded to that debilitating shame by honoring her to bring her healing.

Then, Jesus spoke to the religious leaders and to the system. Jesus spoke to a system that had created rules that did not affect the enforcer. Jesus responded to rules that overlooked the intent of the law. Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath is not a day to be lazy, but rather the Sabbath is a day where the community stops its routine work and gathers to rid the world of oppression and abusive shame.

Today we are challenged in that same way. We are called to wonder: Where have you been contorted, twisted, and warped? Where have you been complicit in our societal

values that bend us from love and grace? For it is there, when we've found ourselves with a misshapen posture, that we're reminded what healing looks like.

These biblical healing texts were sometimes difficult to work with as a hospital chaplain. Some patients would tell me they didn't have enough faith or that their illness was punishment. Some were literally bent over from age or illness, and they would get down on themselves because, in their mind, they weren't made well. Yet, today we do not hear that this woman had faith, and still she is healed. We don't know her exact illness or if this was a metaphorical healing. What I do know is that I've been bedside with families who had been torn apart - families that were disfigured by abuse, addiction, illness, and secrets. There we stood tearful bent over a loved one who died. They all had prayed for healing, and I saw their healing. You see, their healing was found in the strength and comfort they received in that time of suffering - strength to comfort one another and strength to be gracious. Their healing was found in the wholeness of reconciliation near the end of life and the peace that comes from the gift of love. Their healing was found when a representative of the church came to them saying, "You are loved, God is with you, and we are with you." Healing of the body is a good thing; and healing is so much more than the bodily afflictions we suffer. Healing of our spirit is powerful; it's healing that brings us wholeness and life. In that healing we're reminded that God draws us in and speaks a word of freedom for us so we might become agents of healing.

God grants us of this healing in our liturgy when our leaders pray with a posture of open arms reminding us of grace and acceptance. We're granted healing as we gather for this holy meal with the touch of your hand and an individualized word spoken directly to

you. We're empowered through the position of anointing, which pronounces God's healing with oil, using the same sign we received in baptism. And we're reminded again and again of God's grace as a dear one calls us, hugs us, smiles at us, or speak a gracious word to us. And that's not the end of the story, for we are then sent from this place to embody that posture of healing.

So there it is - you *are* an inheritor of God's gift of healing. While you *are* bent and warped, we all are, you *are* also made well. Receive the gifts of God's healing presence. Then, go sit with those who suffer, using words only if you must. Go seek a posture of wholeness and share its grace. Go open yourself to the embodiment of love. "You *are* now well." Go and share the good news. Amen.