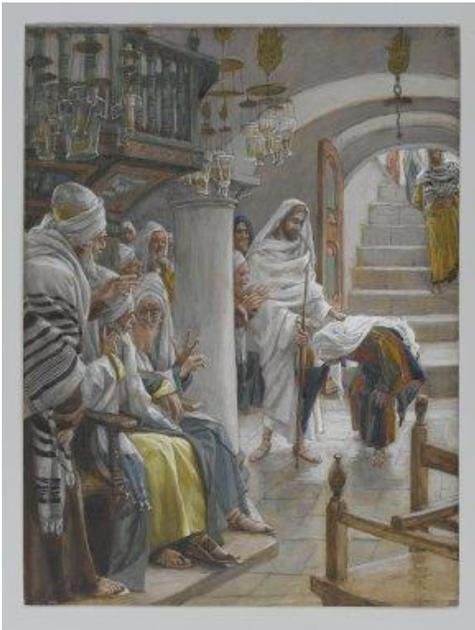


SERMON FOR AUGUST 25, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
14th Sunday after Pentecost - 7:45 Worship Service

Scripture: **Luke 13:10-17 (Focus)**; (Hebrews 12:18-29)

Message: ***GOD Call us All!***
GOD Affirms us All!
GOD is a Refuge for All!
Kekapa P.K. Lee



Gathering in the Word

Our GOD is intimate (*close, cozy, warm, near, cherished*) and uncontrollable! Our church systems and rules we've created only point us to GOD; however, they do not and cannot contain GOD's energy of aloha!

- ✓ Sabbath keeping is good, but not restrictive.
- ✓ Love trumps order and rule.
- ✓ God's freely healing aloha bursts through our ritual and theological limits!

Hearing the Word

Luke 13:10-17 (The VOICE Bible)

¹⁰ Around this time, He was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, *the Jewish day of rest*. ¹¹ A woman there had been sick for 18 years; she was weak, hunched over, and unable to stand up straight. ¹²⁻¹³ Jesus placed His hands on her and suddenly she could stand straight again. She started praising God, ¹⁴ but the synagogue official was indignant because Jesus had not kept their Sabbath regulations by performing this healing.

Synagogue Official: Look, there are six other days when it's appropriate to get work done. Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath!

Jesus: ¹⁵ You *religious leaders* are such hypocrites! Every single one of you unties his ox or donkey from its manger every single Sabbath Day, and then you lead it out to get a drink of water, right? ¹⁶ Do you care more about your farm animals than you care about this woman, one of Abraham's daughters, oppressed by Satan for 18 years? Can't we untie her from her oppression on the Sabbath?

¹⁷ As the impact of His words settled in, His critics were humiliated, but everyone else loved what Jesus said and celebrated everything He was doing.

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath (Jews observed worship on Saturday). Among his audience was a crippled woman; her body was permanently bent over for **18 years** so that she could not stand up straight.

Jesus called her to the center of the synagogue and told her she was free to stand tall as he touched her. **She immediately did so!**

There was a debate from the leaders about whether healing was allowed on the Sabbath. Jesus argued that the Sabbath was a day set aside for praising God, and that it should benefit people not burden them.

Jesus humiliated and shamed his opponents; though that wasn't Jesus goal to do that. Jesus normally did things on the Sabbath that got the religious leaders mad at him! In every incident and event—Jesus used this times to remind the Jewish leaders that despite their pious intentions—they had significantly misunderstood the very purpose of Sabbath.

The Sabbath was meant to be a day of *delight*, rest, and enjoyment! We delight and take joy in remembering that GOD is redeeming the Creation and salvaging all that evil has dishonored and made dirty so as to return Creation to the glory GOD intended in the beginning!

So to the Jews, the Sabbath means—no work. Over time the devout in Israel ran with it and made somewhere around **613** other rules and regulations on top of the 4th Commandment. What was to be a day of joy in both Creation and Redemption became a frightening day in which people worried the whole day long that they might mess up and perform a deed of work after all!

- ✓ We see that the ox or donkey was being treated better than humans.
- ✓ The donkey has a higher status than the human being!

Then comes Jesus . . . the Son of GOD!

The bent-over-woman-of-18-years condition was caused by an evil spirit sent by Satan himself! **So Jesus touched and healed her!**

No big thing, eh? Except for the *religious gate-keepers*—the people “were delighted” at Jesus healing this woman!

Doing the Word

So on this last Sunday in August, what is the Word of God for us?

1.ONE: OUR GOD IS A GOD OF HOPE!

The woman's twisted body, permanently bent downwards so that she saw only the dirt, symbolizes people who lack hope, or see only the negative things in life.

With Jesus' help we can lift our vision upwards, towards God, and be optimistic and hopeful.

Our GOD is always a GOD of Hope!

2.TWO: RULES ARE CREATED EVEN IN THE CHURCH AND WE ARE TO TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT

We smile about the Jews in this story. But you know—we Christians and our Churches do the same thing!

- ✓ Our churches also have lots of rules!
- ✓ The story inspires us to mentally straighten ourselves to a standing position, where we see upwards to God for inspiration.
- ✓ Jesus teaches that rules (like observance of the Sabbath) should be treated with respect, but they should not be a straitjacket either.

3.THREE: SABBATH SHOULD ALL BE ABOUT DELIGHT!

- ✓ Enjoyment
- ✓ Pleasure
- ✓ Happiness
- ✓ Joy & Glee
- ✓ Gladness
- ✓ Reveling in

That's what our Sundays are to be as well! Yes we worship and we enjoy our worship time; we also do a lot of other things as well!

Sent in the Word

The Rev. Mary Earle, wrote a poem, "***The Woman Bent,***" about that woman in Luke 13. She paints a picture of what it's like to be bent over for 18 years. The woman was only able to look at her feet, the dirt, and her calluses. The woman said she had been bent for so long she thought this was how she was made. She'd forgotten what it was like to stand straight and breathe without labor, to look out and see the world.

Do you know what that's like? Do you know what it's like to have grown so far from the person you were created to be that you don't even remember who you were? The woman said that standing straight felt odd,

*"Feels like I am a different person.
Feels like I can see, breathe, move, speak.
Feels like I can't be bent again.
Feels like I am a different woman,
and yet this body knows being bent is hell."*

The woman goes on to say,
"Funny thing, when he laid hands on me,
I wanted to stand up.
Something in me remembered—
I have not always been this way.
I have not always been curved and twisted.

"So now I can breathe.
I can take a breath and simply feel the rush of air.
I can see the sky.
I can speak because I can breathe.
And I have plenty to say."*

There's more to the poem, about her memories of the years of being bent over and all she learned from them, about being thankful for seeing her disability from both sides now.

But the point I want to lean on is that from the time we are born, we do begin to forget who we are and can be. We can be stuck in our infirmity/dysfunction and believe that "that's all there is," as Frank Sinatra sang so many years ago. Yes, it hurts to be stuck there. Yes, I wish I didn't have to hurt. But we tell ourselves, "That's all there is for me. I'm not worth any more than this. I just have to suffer. That's all there is." It's easy to make excuses.

Resignation is weak, because it has no desire for transformation. I limit what I can do about it by own picture of who I am. If I've forgotten who I am, then I'm stuck.

We may wonder how people who have come from the most traumatic, painful backgrounds can end up triumphantly whole, and how some people from those same circumstances are never able to overcome the damage that has been done to them. Each of us has our own limit to strength and endurance, but there is a way to find strength and endurance beyond our own power. Following a spiritual path will give us that additional power to see that we can be more than what we think we are. Spirit can work in us for maturation, for transformation, for a vision of life as God intended for us.

The woman who was bent for 18 years asked for healing. She had not forgotten that she could ask that of a man who brought light to her darkness.

Hope appears when we look for it, when we bathe our lives in a light stronger than our own and then trust. Transformation requires a new way of seeing, though. Look up, and make yourself ready in Spirit's power.