

Sermon For Sunday, August 21, 2016 - "Set Free to See"

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 21, 2016

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Luke 13:10-17

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day](#)

"Set Free to See"

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Imagine what it was like to be the woman in our Gospel reading. For the first time in 18 years she could stand up straight, move freely, raise her head to the sun. Imagine how her perspective changed as well. For 18 years her eyes had been cast down at the ground. Once she was raised up her gaze was lifted up as well. She could take in the whole horizon; she could look a loved one in the eye. The whole world was now in her line of sight. She could see so many reasons to give thanks and praise to God.

Yet just as she was being lifted up and her vision expanded, a synagogue leader's eyes were narrowing in anger and judgment. When the leader saw this woman being healed on the Sabbath he became indignant. We're told "he kept saying to the crowd that she was wrong to seek healing on the Sabbath." Rather than rejoicing that she was lifted up, he criticized her and told her she should have waited to seek healing. Just as she stood tall for the first time in 18 years, he sought to take her back down a notch. This angered Jesus; Jesus rebuked the leader and those he'd stirred up. He turned their argument about the Sabbath on its head and "all his opponents were put to shame." Jesus lifted the woman up and tore his opponents down.

This has all the makings of a made-for-TV drama - the moving story of someone lifted up by a powerful hero, the bad guys who interfere, the happy ending when the good guys win. It has the makings of an inspiring story from the Olympics - a humble person lifted up by a heroic coach and opponents put to shame. It sounds like a story of winners and losers with clear good guys and bad guys. Or, at least that is often how this sounds in a culture steeped in election coverage, poll results, Olympics results and reality TV shows in which some people advance to fame and some are put to shame.

We're often tempted to use stories like this to judge ourselves the winners and our opponents the losers, to think that we are on the side of helping people and our opponents are angry hypocrites who should be convicted by Jesus, who should be ashamed of themselves. Yet this story is not about winners and losers, good and bad. It is about how Jesus lifts up and tears down in order to set us all free. Jesus' ministry is all about lifting up the lowly and tearing down the proud. Even before Jesus was born, his mother Mary sang in her Magnificat that this is what Jesus would do. Yet the lifting up and tearing down is not to make winners and losers, to reward the good and punish the bad. Jesus lifts up and tears down to free us all from everything that binds us, everything that prevents us from seeing clearly.

The leader of the synagogue needed freeing and healing as much as the bent-over woman. The problem was not that he was trying to keep the law. Christians have often used this story to say Jews are too legalistic, they

got it wrong and now we've got it right. That isn't what is going on here. The problem isn't that he wanted to protect the Sabbath. Sabbath allows all of creation to rest, to experience freedom from the demands of work. Rather, the problem is that he was unable to see that this woman desperately needed the rest and freedom that Sabbath offers. He was bound by judgment and righteous indignation which prevented him from rejoicing when Jesus set the woman free. Like her, his vision was narrowed by his condition. He was unable to see the woman in front of him as a 'daughter of Abraham', a sister in faith. He needed to be taken down a notch so that his gaze could be turned to his neighbors around him. He needed the obstacles that got in his way torn down. For him, that day, healing required a tearing down.

At times each of us needs to be lifted up; at times each of us needs to be humbled. In a world that trains us to judge good and bad and to look for winners and losers, we all need healing. We all need our perspective changed so that we will see one another not as good or bad but as beloved children of God. We need the obstacles to our sight named and identified so that we all can be set free. In our time, an obstacle that is blinding and binding most of us is our white privilege. White privilege is the invisible system conferring dominance on whites. I encourage you to look up *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* for a list of 46 simple examples of white privilege. ([White Privilege:Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)) Those of us who are white are not bad people because we have white privilege. But we harm others when we refuse to see and acknowledge the privilege we carry and the ways it gives us power over people of color. We harm others when we do not use the power we have in order to help lift them up.

We need to be healed. We need to be set free. We need our perspective broadened for the sake of all God's children. This is what God does for us in worship. In worship we are convicted and forgiven. We are humbled and lifted up. Then God sends us out into the world into difficult conversations, into situations that will make us uncomfortable, into opportunities to develop mutual relationships with people of all colors.

God is at work in all of this to humble us, to lift us up, to heal us and set us free.

Let's take a moment to pray.