

## Setting Free From What Binds Us: Spiritual Freedom in an Age of Addiction and Alienation

Lk. 13: 10-17 The Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall Christ Church, Middle Haddam August 22, 2010

Randy had an elderly, arthritic aunt who, when asked how she was doing, invariably responded with a sigh, "Oh, like always." This became a bit of a joke. Why bother to ask the old lady if things never changed? And there was a certain reassuring comfortableness to the predictable response. "Like always." But what if, suddenly, things were NOT "like always"? What if, out of the blue, a radical change happened and she got better? It wouldn't be comfortable. It would be exciting. It would be dramatic. It would be a miracle. Healing is violent and scary. It wrenches out of the physical problems and emotional ruts we're in. And healing asks something of us.

Well, being a Christian is a dangerous identity for those who say things are "like always." Better get ready. Because the man-God Jesus cannot help but heal. So what does he want of us?

In today's reading from Luke, the local religious leaders are upset with Jesus, yet again. This time they are furious because they say he violated Jewish law by healing a woman on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, no one is to do any work.

Jesus answers them by reminding them that, when their donkey is thirsty on the Sabbath, they lead the donkey out of its stall so that it may drink water. They don't jeopardize their cow's health by refusing to

do the work of drawing water for it on the Sabbath. They need that donkey to do their work! They need that cow to produce milk!

Similarly, Jesus has taken this woman out of the confinement in which she found herself. He has given her, as he did elsewhere with the Samaritan woman at the well, "living water" to drink. She has been curved in on herself, folded in two so that she could not look up to see the sky, could not see others faces around her. This incurvation is the physical posture of focus on the self. Despond, despair, depression, lack of healing. Luke tells us that the woman "had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all." She was stuck. And she didn't even ASK to be healed!

Elsewhere in the New Testament, people call out to Jesus and say, "Jesus make me well" "Heal my son." "Give me sight." Sometimes, Jesus approaches people in need of healing and asks them, as he did with the man lying on his bed near the pool of Siloam, "Do you WANT to be made well?" But here, Jesus is kind of rude: he doesn't even ask the woman if she'd LIKE to be healed. He just DOES it: "when Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your sickness.'"

And nothing is the same, ever again. No more "like always." And Jesus says to the woman, after he has healed her, "you are freed" "You are released from Satan's bond that has held you for the past eighteen years." And yet, in a very profound way, the woman is LESS free than before. Before, she might have labored under the burden of learned helplessness. It's almost easier to be in need, to be dependent, to have one day blur into the next with no more expectations, to cuddle one's pain close

“like always.” Now this woman is “free” and stands “erect” ... but she must get to WORK! This event is not so much about healing as it is *about getting to work*. That’s why Jesus uses the analogy with cattle, and livestock, farm horses and oxen. These are beasts who labor in the fields of the Lord. They’ve all BEEN working—that’s why they get to rest on the Sabbath. But for eighteen long years, this woman has been bound up in her illness, unable to do God’s work. Now she must get to work! So must each of us, in response to our healing. Like it or not, we are under a NEW bond, a new obligation: to Christ our healer. We’ve got to cooperate, to be his co-workers, to co-heal with him.

There is so much in our day and age, perhaps more than in biblical times, that binds and disables us. Copdependent relationships. People who make excuses for us—who help us to NOT help ourselves. It’s easier to stay in the same old rut than to make a change and really live. Fear. Anxiety. Obsessive compulsive disorder. Drug addiction. So many crutches that we use to say, “don’t heal me. Not just now.” Alcoholism. It’s easier to drink than to look at the source of the pain. So many pharmaceuticals prescribed—we’ve sold our soul to Big Oil, the base for most of these medications. What if we were to try to stand alone, to throw these crutches away?

I’m not saying we all can. But some can. And we can try, with God’s help. And when there is a change, even the slightest, we can celebrate and embrace that change, not reject it. We can thank Jesus and ask him what He’s got in mind for us to do this day. What work awaits us in the fields of the Lord?

And by the way, if you have an affliction from which you continue to suffer, don’t assume that you haven’t been healed. If you have multiple sclerosis, but you’re serving in your community and giving

grace to others, are you not MORE healed than so many who are still locked up inside themselves? If you have rheumatoid arthritis, yet you walk -- however slowly -- to call on others to encourage them, how much more swiftly do you run in the Spirit! Healing takes many forms. And there are many kinds of work to be done.

What work is there for us to do this day? Straighten up in the Spirit. You are freed from what has bound you.

Amen.