

I want to lift up that today is the National Day of Healing to commemorate 400 years of African American History and Culture. 400 years ago the first enslaved Africans were brought to the United States. Can we have a moment of silence as we let that sink in..... A 4 minute tolling of bells will take place in various establishments across the country today at 3:30. *Let us pray for the hard work of reconciliation with those whose skin color is different from our own. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.*

### *Mended*

First Congregational Church Branford  
August 25, 2019; Luke 13:10-17  
Rev. Suzanne Personette

In today's passage from Luke, we see Jesus heal *yet again* on the Sabbath, which was against Jewish law. Jesus would always argue that it was right to do good and to save life on the sabbath, that concern over the suffering of fellow human beings takes precedence over the law.

Luke 13:10-17

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 eighteen years. She was bent over and was 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 or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

The word of God for the people of God.

Jesus heals a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years. Let that sink in...

And, let this sink in... might there be a place inside all of us that is crippled and needs to be set free?... There may be someone here today whose body and spirit has crippled them for a long time. We may not even know it. Or, we may not be crippled on the outside, but be sure can be crippled on the inside. Fear is crippling, grief is crippling, low self-esteem is crippling, anger is crippling, going over and over bad things that happened in the past can definitely slump you down, and break your spirit. This is often what we do - go over and over and over again situations in the past that harmed us. It cripples us, it cripples our spirit.

In this week's Spire newsletter, I shared some lyrics from Matthew West's song called "Mended." You might be in a place where it would be nice to hear God say these words to you:

*When you see broken beyond repair, I see healing beyond belief*

*When you see too far gone, I see one step away from home*

*When you see nothing but damaged goods, I see something good in the making*

*When you see wounded, I see mended*

*You see your worst mistake - but, I'm making all things new,  
and I will make a miracle of you*

*When you see broken beyond repair, I see healing beyond belief*

*When you see wounded, I see mended*

The morning Jesus sees the woman in the synagogue he doesn't see her broken beyond repair, he sees her mended. He sees her set free. He calls her over, lays his hands on her, and she stands up straight. And, she looks everyone in the eye! Can you imagine what that must've been like for her - having been slumped over, looking at everyone's feet, probably feeling less than. And, now she is eye to eye, an equal. Jesus sees her as someone who matters.

I wonder, is she a guest at this worship service? Had she heard Jesus the Healer would be there, and she had hope in her heart? Scripture says *just then there appeared a woman*. Maybe she's late to worship. It would've taken her time to get ready, and time to walk to the synagogue. Like maybe right now she would just be arriving...

There was a 70 year old woman in one of my churches whose back had been twisted for years and years. It took her 2-3 hours once she woke up to get ready to come to church. She drove, but it took an enormous amount of time for her to get into and out of the car, and time to walk with her walker into the church - where she was Head Usher!

I prayed for two years for physical healing for Alice, to stand up straight, to look everyone in the eye, but the progression of her disease only ever got worse. We don't always get the healing we ask for, huh? That's hard. It's hard to read

these healing stories in the bible, isn't it, when you don't get the healing you ask for... So, I came to understand that I'd been called to walk *with* Alice, to help heal a spirit that had been crippled long before her body. I helped her believe in God and that God cared about her; she also needed permission to just be and to say what was painful and dark; and she needed softness and tenderness. I talked a lot about meditating - floating on the ease of large, puffy, cushy clouds a place of no pain, only ease. Alice was being mended in God's house.

More than any gospel, Luke highlights stories where Jesus *heals* those others won't, *invites* those others won't, *lifts up* those others won't. The Gospel of Luke is the social justice gospel. In first century Palestine, a woman carried no weight, and yet Luke shows a woman at the center of this story. The word ailment is translated as *a spirit of weakness* - Woman, you are set free from a spirit of weakness. Luke offers this story of the stooped woman as the *story* of woman - Jesus came to set them free - you are no longer stooped over. You are no longer weak. You are no longer slave. Unfortunately, 2,000 years later that message still needs to be spread *all over the world*. Amen? The world still sees woman as weak, as inferior to men, but God sees woman as strong, equal, eye to eye. Eye to eye.

In our first hymn, we sang, *When I see the pain you carry, shall I, with a gentle touch bind up all those wounds*. Jesus *touched* the woman - who may not have been touched for 18 years! I think of some church members who don't receive enough touch. People talk with me about it. I'm grateful we have a gospel of touch! Babies get a lot of touch, don't they - when we need it our whole life long! At church we can hug someone, we can reach out and touch someone's arm - a touch can say, *I'm here with you. I'm with you. You're not alone. When you're sitting at home alone watching tv, remember this touch, remember I'm with you, remember I'll be here with a hug on Sunday. Please feel Jesus in my touch. He wants to touch you today. He wants to set you free. Where you see wounded he sees mended*.

Maybe we can do a little touch of our neighbor's arm in an exercise. If its uncomfortable for you, just close your hands - it's okay, your neighbor will find someone else. If you'd like, turn to your neighbor, and if it's okay, one of you place your hand on their hand, forearm, upper arm, or shoulder, and say *two* things: *When you see wounded, I see mended*. Then pause and say, *You are mended*. Then, you be the receiver. *When you see wounded, I see mended. You are mended*.

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Wow, that was powerful! Lotsa healing and mending going on in here!

Healing is certainly a mystery. But, it does seem to me that when we don't get the healing we ask for, God often sends the right people into our lives to touch us in some way.

Maybe what matters more to God than a healed body is a healed heart. Jesus uses each one of us to touch, free and heal others. You've been given that power - the power to heal! The power to mend. O friend, he sees *you* today - he wants to set you free.

I've been with you for 17 months, and I know the hard things people have said about this wonderful church of yours. I know they saw wounded, and I saw mended. I knew God could see the whole picture and knew where he'd be taking you. He sees FCC mended.

Like the woman in today's story, rejoice at all the wonderful things God is doing - in you, and in your church.

I invite you to go to the Prayers of the People prayer in your bulletin... let us pray together...

**When we are afraid and can only whisper our fear, you bend over to listen to us. For times when it seems that no one knows our name, you know us as your Beloved. When others would weigh us down with shame and guilt, you set us free with your joy. When we are bent over by our doubts and questions, you reach out to touch us with your hope and grace. When our fears shake us to the core, you touch us with your serenity. When we cannot stand up and see our way, you take us by the hand to lead us home. God in Community, Holy in One, we tremble with praise and joy before you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.**