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OUR CALLING TO REACH, TEACH, EQUIP, AND SEND

Deuteronomy 6:1-8 Luke 13:10-17

The “bent woman” in Luke 13 stepped forward at Jesus’ invitation, even though she knew her healing would bring trouble from the religious authorities. No doubt the folks in the church recognized this woman, they had seen her there for years, all stooped over. At one time in her life she was healthy and strong, but eighteen years ago something happened that left her “crippled by ‘a spirit’” that bent her low. What does that mean? Was she injured, was it an illness, was it low calcium in her bones, osteoporosis? Usually “crippled by a spirit” denotes that something has gotten hold of you, has taken control of your life, and you can’t shake it. It dictates where you go...or can’t go...how you act, how you think of yourself, and think of others. It controls you.

Maybe this woman was crippled by an addiction of some sort. Maybe she was traumatized as a child or an adult by some type of mistreatment or abuse. Maybe she was bent under the burden of being different, of not looking like everyone else, the burden of not being able to do what everyone else can do, She is everyone who has been nicknamed cruelly, ridiculed, ostracized, laughed at, kept out of the group...anyone who has been told “You can’t” and believed it, or “you don’t belong” and accepted it...anyone who has lost hope. Whatever it was, and whatever afflicts us today, whenever we alter our behavior to accommodate our affliction, we’ve been trapped, crippled, controlled by that ‘spirit.’ And once you’re under the power of that spirit, it can seem like there is no escape, no way out; you just grin and bear it. Keep your head down, don’t draw attention, slip in late and sit in the back corner of the room, hunched over, ignore the stares and sneers.

But when Jesus saw her, he *called her over*, called her aside to himself, and she had faith enough to step forward to receive his word for her. Jesus said, “*Woman, you are set free from your ailment.*” The Greek text is very precise in saying *not that* Jesus healed her, but that he *loosed* her, set her free, unbound her, released her, from bondage! “*Woman, you are set free from your ailment...you are free from your oppression...you are free from judgment...free from teasing...free from shaming...free from nasty nicknames. You are no longer under the power of this thing that has controlled your life for so long. You are free to be who you are and not who others tell you that you are. You are free to live in the grace and mercy of the God who loves you and cares about you. You are free to love yourself, accept yourself. You are precious and cherished. Then, in verse 13, “When Jesus laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God!”*

The synagogue official was not happy with her blessing. He was indignant because Jesus had cured her on the Sabbath. **Notice**, the leader didn't *deny* that Jesus had power to heal, nor was he upset that she was healed. He was upset that Jesus had disobeyed the rules and he told the crowd that if anyone else wanted healing they should return on a weekday. In his mind, procedures and protocols were more important than the person!

Jesus rebukes the officials out of their own law, calls them hypocrites. Rabbis abhorred cruelty to animals, and their Sabbath laws allowed them to untie their oxen or donkeys from their stall and lead them to water to drink. Jesus demanded, "if you can untie your animal from a stall and water it on the Sabbath – shall I not also set free this woman from her infirmity?" Is the Sabbath not about liberation and new life in God's grace?

Then Jesus calls the women "*...a daughter of Abraham.*" That may not mean much to you, but it meant everything to her, and to all who heard Jesus call her that. Jesus looks at the crowd, with their mouths still open, and reminds them that this woman, the woman they have made fun of, made to feel "less than" for all these years, is just as much a part of God's community as is anyone in the synagogue. The family of God, after all, is not about shaming people into conformity, or ostracizing those who differ, or marginalizing those who struggle, or helping those outside our circles as if it's some wonderful gesture on our part. The family of God is about loving and forgiving and helping and serving; building up, not tearing down; reaching out and bringing others closer to God who is the center of our shared life.

I don't know what has you "bent over" today...what is holding you down, holding you back, ...what is controlling you. I don't know with what 'spirit' you struggle or what nicknames others have laid on you and by which they define you. But I do know this: Jesus has come to set you free! And when he calls you by name, what he offers is life, life set free, life that is rich and full and bright! You no longer have to live bent over to anything or anymore because Jesus who knows all the truth about you, still loves you, and calls you *daughter*, calls you *son*!

You are a child of God, created by God, redeemed by God, chosen by God, called by God. You count! You matter! You have a part to play in the redemption of the world! God intends for you to count for something, to be a blessing, to contribute to the lives of others! Stand up straight, act like it, and grow into the person God intends you to be!

How and where do you gain faith bold enough to respond to Jesus when he calls to you, as the bent woman did? From other people in your life. We are called to share our faith with each other, to build up one another, to reach AND TEACH and to send each other out as followers of Jesus.

Rally Day celebrates Christian Education and ministries that nurture faith in God, trust of God, and devotion to God. In both of our passages today – Deuteronomy and Luke, the critical element is timeliness – seize the opportunity to teach and train and prepare your

children and your peers when and where you find it, don't forfeit the opportunity. Don't shirk your responsibility.

We provide Sunday School, but Christian education and nurture does not take place just in Sunday School! Our education arenas include Small Groups, Presbyterian Women Circles, Youth Fellowships, Trinity Learning Center preschool, men's groups, fellowship groups, worship, service projects, choir, music, women's retreats and men's retreats, Montreat, Montreat for Middle School in Maryville, camp at Dogwood Acres, all sorts of endeavors! *I expect you to be in Sunday School, but also in our other church programs too!*

One hour of Sunday School a week won't get the job done, y'all! The rest of the world has our children's attention every day, and Satan works on us every day! In Deuteronomy 6, God says *"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. And you shall teach them diligently to your children. Talk about them at home...and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you rise up."*

- **Who's** to reach and teach, train and send them? Parents are!
- **When** are we to talk about God's commands? Anytime, morning, noon, and night.
- **Where** are we to teach them? At home, when you walk along the road, when you're out and about, wherever and whenever possible.

We are to teach and train diligently and repeatedly, but talking the talk is not enough. We've must walk the walk. We must model and exemplify for others what God calls us to be and to do.

My father talked to me about his faith in God when he and I worked in his workshop and when we went fishing. Driving me to school, he compared traffic laws that keep us safe from other drivers and keep us from hurting other people, to God's rules on how we are to treat people, what we as Christians do and do not do. When I started dating girls, Dad stressed that I was responsible for my date's safety and security and I was not to take her anywhere unsafe; and he discussed God's teachings about sex and marriage, what is allowed and what is not. Once while we were playing golf, Dad connected golf rules about honesty, fairness, and integrity to God's rules for life. Driving me home from college one year, during our three ours in the car together, Dad shared with me his faith in God, what God had done in his life, what Presbyterians believe about God, why he trusted God, and why an educated person is better equipped to do God's will. My mother and father modeled for my sisters and me what they taught us. They did not tell us, "Do as I say, not as I do."

What are your children learning as they watch you and listen to you? What are church members learning as they watch you and listen to you? Christian Education is the

fulfillment of our congregational baptismal vow to help one another grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!

Fathers, are you teaching your children God's commandments and how to live as a Christian? Mothers, are you doing that? Grandparents, how about you? One day we will all stand judgment before God and if He asks you what you did to point your child and your friends to Jesus, how will you respond?

- Teenagers, are you learning what you need to learn in order to live a Christians?
- Adults, are you learning what you need to learn in order to live a Christian life?
- Are you learning how resist the pressures and temptations in this increasingly secular world?

I Peter 5:8 warns that *Satan prowls the earth like a roaring lion seeking to devour you.*

To prepare and protect our children and our peers we must teach them:

Who God is and how God saves us, delivers us, frees us in Jesus Christ.

We must teach them the reality of evil in our world and how to resist Satan

They need to learn the Bible as God's self-revelation and word to them

They need to learn that sin leads to death but eternal life is God's gift through Christ

We must model for them intimacy with God and personal obedience to God

God judges our world now and will judge us on the final judgment day

They need to know God's love shown in Jesus Christ; love is faith in action

They need to learn why they need the Church; how churches help people to face day to day struggles and live the good life

We must show How to pray, how to share your faith,

And Why we are called to serve others and not live only to self

With God's help and with intentionality, we can give our members a strong foundation on which to build their relationship with God. Together we can fulfill our calling ...to love God, ...to love people, ...to make disciples, ...and to make a difference.

IT'S GAME DAY FOR EDUCATION, FOLKS! It's time to step up!

Decide TODAY what classes you will attend! What small groups you will attend.

Determine what you need to change in order to fulfill your calling,
what training and skills and equipping you need,
and seek that which you need.

Start today to fulfill your calling to reach and teach and equip people in Christian living and then send them out in service to this world to fulfill their life mission!

Do not remain bent and burdened and bowed down!

Let Jesus raise you up and set you loose!

To God be the glory! Amen!

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