

## **Sermon**

**Trinity 10 Yr C - Sunday 21st August 2022**

**Isaiah 58.9–14, Hebrews 12.18–29, Luke 13.10-17**

This poor woman has been bent double for 18 years.

She was doomed to look only at the ground and could never look anyone in the eye. This condition robbed her of her dignity and rightful place in the community.

It may be a physical condition. But the fact that Jesus described her malady as caused by a demon leads us to speculate that her paralysis may be spiritual.

This is how evil spirits work. They hold us in such a way that we bend only over earthly matters and are concerned only with material riches, worldly power, and fleeting pleasures. We cannot look up to heaven, God, our Creator and Saviour. Sometimes the weight of the past can cripple us - that could be sorrows, resentment, nostalgia, or an overwhelming attachment to things and places.

When Jesus sees this woman, He decides to take the initiative himself, influenced by deep compassion for her misery.

Jesus' intervention made all the difference for her. Immediately she stood up straight and began a new way of being and living. As a person of faith, she praised God, who had given her freedom again.

We know that this is the way God works. Jesus wants to free us of any improper restrictions. He wants to restore us to our proper stature and to let us see as He sees. Jesus wants us to have life in its fullness and sets out to free us from everything that holds us captive.

This woman was healed, but is she the only one in today's story that is enslaved by evil spirits?

In the place of this miracle, in the synagogue, there was one religious leader and other people like him who were spiritually more distorted and "bent" than this woman. The synagogue leader was "indignant that Jesus healed on the Sabbath" (Lk 13:14). Instead of rejoicing, he was angry, and his eyes were focused only on the law about the Sabbath.

The leader of the synagogue is still bent to the ground. He did not want to notice someone special in Jesus. Even the pain and suffering of defenceless people become indifferent to him. In his spiritual blindness and "crookedness", he does not see the suffering Christ in suffering people.

The synagogue leader asserts that the Sabbath is not an appropriate time for God to manifest his compassion and mercy.

The leader of the synagogue presents numerous conceited and malicious people who do not rejoice in the good done by others. He represents those everywhere

and in everyone who sees only wrong action, who criticize everything except what they do, think and say, because only they can decide what is right, good, proper, and valuable. They are overwhelmed by pride which isolates them internally from the truth. Anger and pride blind them, deforming the way they look and judge.

Harvard Professor Hugh O'Doherty says that all conflict is about power and control; in fact, a great deal of other human activity involves power and control in one way or another.

Today's gospel reveals the tendency for humans to resort to methods of power and control to achieve what they want or feel they need.

It has nothing to do with love for God; it isn't a search for truth or love, and it's grasping for control.

A review of church history reveals many situations in which power and control led to tragic consequences. It happens in every religion and any institution associated with power and influence over other people.

The tendency to centre so much of our lives on power and control – especially in selfish ways – is dangerous at any time.

Of course, using power and control is not always bad, and it can be an important self-protective mechanism when we are in harm's way or a way to produce justice and defend the helpless. Even though power can be used for good in other ways, we are called to resist the harmful use of power for control and look to the model of Jesus for direction.

Jesus claims that God's actions cannot be dictated to or restricted by humans. God's mercy and healing know no limits of time or place.

The meaningless, legalistic arguments of the Pharisees are shown up for what they are: hypocritical and meaningless.

The action leaves us separated from God whenever we use power over others without love. The synagogue's leader attempted to preserve his power and control of the community by using the power of his authority and a literal expression of Sabbath law to dishonour Jesus and control those present.

"Love and do what you want", - once said, St. Augustine.

When love is lacking, we need a "guide" in the form of the law in our lives, lest we go astray. However, when we are filled with love like Jesus, we know perfectly well what to do and when. No law is needed anymore.

That's why Jesus put himself above the law because Love is above the law. Because the law is needed only where there is no Love. So let us ask God today for the gift of love, so that we can love as he does, without judging, without the limitations of time and space.

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