

Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
26.viii.2007, 08:30, Spoken Eucharist; 10:00 ELW Service of the Word
Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 103:1-8; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

Now he 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."

--Luke 13:10-12

A member of this congregation asked me on Thursday how I planned to use the two days remaining in the bit of vacation time I took last week. I knew that I wanted to spend it with my dogs, of course, and with good friends, and, if possible, to continue the theme of good cooking, which to me is the most relaxing of all pastimes, together with convivial eating and drinking and even music-making

if possible. I was blessed with all of these wishes come true and with something else besides. Sharing the conviviality of a gathering of pastors of our South York Conference and some members of their families and friends, I was asked to join in a service of healing with Anointing of the Sick for one of our brother pastors and his wife—not a bad preparation for hearing and preaching today’s Gospel!

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation,

“Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures, especially of the hip, spine and wrist, although any bone can be affected.

Osteoporosis is a major public health threat for an estimated 44 million Americans, or 55 percent of the people 50 years of age and older. In the U.S., 10 million individuals are estimated to already have the disease and almost 34 million more are estimated to have low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis.

Of the 10 million Americans estimated to have osteoporosis, eight million are women and two million are men.”

My mother is one of these estimated eight million American women suffering from osteoporosis. Osteoporosis does not set her apart or make her special. Instead it lumps her in with a very common class of people, most of them women, who must endure this too in addition to all the other insults and ravages of age. As for many, the disease has diminished and harmed much more than her bone structure and physical stature. The internal organs, especially the heart and lungs, are forced to bear part of the weight for which the spine was created, and, so, many other complications occur and many limitations on life, on its quality and, ultimately, its length, must be accepted and endured. My mother has been blessed with good treatment and some advances that have been made in medications that can slow the deterioration of bone, as have many, for which thanks be to God!

According to Saint Luke the Evangelist, whom Holy Tradition remembers as a physician and as personal physician to the Blessed Mother of Our LORD, the woman Our LORD heals in today's Gospel undoubtedly suffered either from a severe back injury, or from osteoporosis. She had been afflicted with her painful spinal ailment for as long as many people of her day lived, for eighteen long years. How did the Savior notice her? She would not have been able to stand up straight to wave at Him from the crowd. She did not even bother to beckon to Him. Who would want to heal her, just one among thousands of hunch-backed women, no longer beautiful and of no social or religious importance? She may not have even been a Jew but rather a Samaritan or a member of some other Semitic tribe since Jesus refers to her in Verse 16 as a "daughter of Abraham" rather than as a "daughter of

Israel.” She was a nobody with a painful, life-shortening problem no one cared about in a world in which it paid top have a strong back to do the back-breaking work of everyday life.

Perhaps He noticed her deformity, but I rather imagine that He noticed her eyes, that she was looking His way, perhaps smiling, silently wondering, even daring to hope whether one of the wonders He had performed for thousands before might be accomplished for her, too. But, there she stood, asking for nothing. Jesus knew hope and openness to the healing power of God when He saw it. And, so, Our LORD called her to Him and declared to her a gift too wonderful to wish: "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

Just like that? Yes, just like that! No matter who she was or wasn't, and no matter how the labor of making her whole again fit or did not fit with the sacred rest of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ, the LORD of the Sabbath, chose to give her peace from her never-ending burden and relief from her unremitting pain. Was there rejoicing with her led by the spiritual leadership of the community? There was *not!* Was there the slightest recognition of a radically new thing that had come to pass, of a real miracle? No. The fact that the power of God had been revealed went uncelebrated and was, on the contrary, *condemned* as having occurred at the wrong time and as having involved a person of no significance.

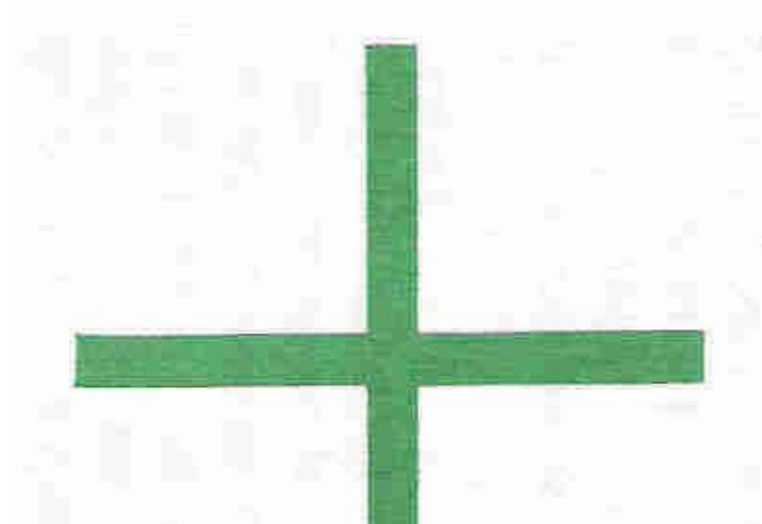
We all know Our LORD's sharp response, and I need not repeat it. Nothing will prevent or in any way

hinder Him from healing you or me or for that matter the whole world of the painful burden we bear, a burden much more painful and a deformity infinitely more hideous than osteoporosis. Even if you or I cannot properly name the thing, *He* knows sin for what it is, as a worthless burden that hinders us from standing up straight and free as we were created to do, full of joy as praise before the Father's face. He stands among us through His Church, in His everlasting Word, through His Holy Sacraments, seeking us out, even when we simply look on in silence, too timid in spirit to ask for His healing. And He prays to the Father to send the Holy Spirit, true God of true God dwelling in our hearts and minds, to draw us back to the Father Who loves us with a love so great He gave and lost *everything* for your sake and for mine.

He does this all for you, for me, for my mother and for all the mothers and daughters like her, and the fathers and sons besides, who must still bear things that likely will not change in this life but which will be not worthy of memory in the life to come. You are set free! You are set free! *You* are set free!

✠Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✠ Amen.



S. D. G. !