

Compassionate Healing | Psalms 71:1-6; Luke 13:10-17 | LUMC | Aug 21, 2022 By Rev Grace Kanake

Today we encounter Jesus' teaching in one of the synagogues, where he healed a lady with an incurable central nervous system that lasted 18 years. This lady needed compassionate healing to take away pain and the shame she carried every day. Who are you in this story? This lady was ill for a long time, are you? Do you too need Jesus' healing? Have lost your identity to anything that troubles you? Can Jesus heal you?

The illness made this lady lose everything; her name, her standing in society, her very self. She was referred as having the "incurable illness, the deformed lady, the bent lady, the crooked woman!" Or simply, "Miss Nobody"! In those times, illness was assumed to occur due to an individual's sin, or that of her family or even the community. In this case, Jesus said that her illness was caused by an evil spirit. It is not clearly explained if her illness was due to her sinfulness or wrong decisions, or simply bad luck. Whatever the case, in that historical period, ill people were isolated until they healed and cleansed themselves at the temple by paying a fine to the temple staff. She may have paid a lot to healers, prophets and seers of her day. She must have visited several healers including even herbalists, but with no reprieve. This illness may well have led her to a resignation of death as her only 'cure'.

The ill lady had heard of Jesus' healing stories although she may not have thought of it as healing her. She was used to a life of pain and misery because she had been stricken for 18 years. Her illness, according to Jesus, "No one else would heal"; not even modern medicine would!

The lady's presence in the synagogue may be indicative of her willingness to be healed even though her illness had demoralized her. Perhaps she never felt capable of seeking Jesus to heal. Or the lady feared the religious leaders would take revenge on her for asking to be healed on the Sabbath and being in the Synagogue. We are not told whether members of her family were urging her to seek healing or maybe restraining her from seeking healing. Neither do we know her thoughts at the time Jesus saw her in the crowd and asked her to come forward. We can only imagine!!

Jesus initiated the healing on his own. He healed her out of his compassion. When he called her, he explained her illness was the result of a bad spirit that perhaps only Jesus could exorcise¹. We know healing was purely by Jesus' effort because he did not ask for the cause of the illness, the effect of illness, or what the lady would want him to do. Jesus looked at her and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment". Jesus moved to lay his hand on the woman. She stood straight, her central nervous system (CNS) reacted; she felt strength coming back and began to "Praise God". Immediately she stood up, she praised God but not Jesus because she knew the reaction from the crowd would be mixed. The lady was a Jew, she knew Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophesy of the coming of Immanuel—God with us—

¹ The cure for evil spirit attack is Jesus, modern medicine cannot, and no human being can heal evil deeds. We need to depend on compassionate God through prayers, and miracle takes place.

but chose to identify with the God of Abraham, the Israelite God. Praising God was the best way of calling the Synagogue attendants to join her in a thanksgiving song. Quickly others identified with her healing and her song of praise.

Because this healing took place in the Synagogue on the Sabbath; it divided the crowd into two camps. The Synagogue religious leaders took opposition to the healing, saying it should have been done on another day not the Sabbath. However, the multitude rejoiced with the lady, recalling all the “glorious things” Jesus had done in their village and elsewhere. The crowd’s sentiments made the religious leaders hang back from accusing and dragging Jesus to court to charge him with wrongdoing.

Jesus healed this lady on the Sabbath to highlight the importance of human life. According to Jewish law the Sabbath is only for prayers from 6 am to 6 pm. The religious leaders had made over 600 laws around the 10 commandments to safeguard them from being broken. One of these laws was not to work on the Sabbath. On a Sabbath day if you sat under a mango tree and a mango fell on you and you touched it, you were considered working and you would have to pay a fine. It was prohibited to walk over a mile from your house on the Sabbath. The only people allowed to eat even a snack on the Sabbath were the sick, the pregnant, and breastfeeding mothers. However, if an animal fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, the owner was allowed to remove it.

Jesus was irritated with these human-made laws geared to affect only the common people, not religious leaders. Jesus the reformer took a bold step to heal on the Sabbath to send a message. To Jesus, this woman with a long life of pain, her healing surpassed feeding animal or the removal of an animal in the ditch. Jesus knew that human life is more important than the life of an animal. After healing the lady, Jesus scolded the religious leaders for being merciless toward the ailing lady. Jesus saw a double standard that needed to be stopped. He said that saving human life is a priority. He pled with the religious leaders and the crowd to feel the pain of others.

Jesus healed this lady so she could reclaim her position in the family of Abraham. She belonged to the covenant although with an illness that isolated her to live a life of misery. After he healed her, Jesus immediately announced her identity—“daughter of Abraham”. The reason behind the announcement was to release her from having to go to the temple and paying a fine for her cleansing. Jesus said her life and physical deformity was now changed to “the perfectly straight woman, an honored lady of the community”. The lady accepted her healing and her new identity and started to praise God. She also became a disciple of Jesus. She followed him, testifying of her new name and new lease on life. She stood in the gap and made everyone aware of her new role of being a disciple.

Jesus also confirmed that the illness was the work of the evil one—the devil, and not of her own making. She did not sin or make wrong decisions. Was the suffering for a reason? Perhaps the devil tried to tempt her to deny her faith, but she testified of God’s saving grace and acclaimed God’s power in healing. She testified in the

presence of the deniers and doubters. She was extremely grateful that Jesus absolved her, her parents and the community of any wrongdoing.

What are we learning in this story? Perhaps a moment of reflecting on some compassionate deeds that God has done in our life? Often these deeds are not easily recognized unless others point them out. Or, with much reflection one can come to realize one's life is being reformed from grace to grace for a reason. I do not take sleeping and waking in the morning as an obvious thing. I do not breathe fresh air daily as an act of nature, or feel down and later feel revived as being by my own effort. I see God in small things like breathing free oxygen and walking on my own feet and dressing myself as part of God's compassionate gifts.²

God continues to appear in my life even in odd times. God appears through others or on God's terms. When I pray for healing, it happens on God's terms and timing. I have experienced God's presence unexpectedly and felt overwhelmed by God's presence. When all these acts of mercy happen in my life, I turn to praise God. I turn to study God's Word and announce these blessings to others. I often talk to other Christians testifying of God's happenings in my life. I know my Savior lives despite my being in the moment, for God is way ahead of me showing the way. I read a great lesson, that Jesus was shoved aside after healing this lady. We too can be shoved aside despite miracles God does in our lives. Let us keep trusting God to save and defend us in midst of evil-bent sinners with negative emotions toward our faith and blessings.

The psalm is a story to believe and to practice in our lives. It is a prayer of an oldster by one who believed God from childhood to old age. The writer says God has remained the fortress, the rock, and a place of refuge through life. God is to be trusted to deliver us from any evil assigned to us by the enemies of the cross. May we have a strong sense of gratitude for the help we got from God in the past, and continue to have confidence in God's mercy as we age, labor and toil for a living. Certainly, we have more doubters of God's saving grace than we have had in the past. These doubters exist as they did during the healing of the lady who suffered for 18 years. They had their vested interest and did not care at all for her well-being. They did not share her happiness for a new lease on life. They expressed their intolerance right in the presence of Jesus.

These doubters with vested interests exist today to doubt our testimony, our walk with the Lord. They might tell you to your face or in the presence of others, "you mean nothing". Be prepared when you explain your faith to your family, when you share with your close friends or coworkers, or when you express your beliefs in the community. Stand up to be counted! The lady in the story was able to stand her ground, and that is why we read about her faith after 2022 years. Our Christian values and our testimonies

² I know God has given us modern medicine to assist those unable to breath on their own. The cane and the wheelchair to assist in walking. What a gift we have!

shall live when we are gone. Let us be mindful of the seeds of faith we plant wherever we are.

Let us not get overwhelmed by doubters or those who openly discredit our faith. We are not alone in this journey of faith; we have support from the psalmist and from Jesus. The psalmist ends the prayer by saying, "Happy is the [person] who can say that God has been my hope and trust since I believed".

If we have continued to learn from God from when we first believed, we shall not lack God's support, even in our physical pain, loss, or blessings. If we trace our faith back to when we first accepted Jesus, we will see a lot that God has done, and we shall continue to praise God.

God shall remain our shelter and place of hope even during life's changing circumstances. Jesus reminds us to be grateful in small things and celebrate the blessings of others; it's not an act of nature like the rising and setting of the sun. Amen!