

# 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

## Proper 16C

August 24, 2025

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17



## Broken, Blessed, Healed

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

Around this time six years ago, I had just returned from a three-month sabbatical that included time in Norway. In considering today's gospel lesson about the healing of a crippled woman, I was reminded of a piece of artwork that I encountered during stunningly beautiful and challenging 170 mile walk on the St. Olaf Way between Oslo and Trondheim, a journey that I made with a group of fellow pilgrims. After a long day of trekking along sparkling streams, through fragrant woodlands, and across flower-strewn meadows, we arrived at a Christian community center in the Oppdahl Valley where we would be spending the night. After we set down our packs and staked out our personal spaces in the large common room... we headed to a sitting area to enjoy a steaming cup of hot cocoa. While sipping the heavenly concoction, I looked up and noticed a piece of art on the wall that was like a line drawing created from black metal wire that was manipulated to tell a story in three parts. At the center of the piece was a simple cross. The story begins in the lower left as a man, carrying a heavy sack over his shoulder is depicted struggling to move up towards the cross. Upon reaching the foot of the cross, the man lays down his burden and then walks upward and away from the cross with his open arms reaching skyward showing that he is free and unburdened. The metal piece was not particularly beautiful, but it spoke of the enduring invitation to bring whatever is weighing us down... and leave our burdens at the foot of the cross. It was a story of healing, freedom, and love.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus is teaching in the temple on the sabbath when he spots a woman who has spent eighteen long years staring down at the ground because of her affliction. We don't know the woman's name. Her crooked spine would have caused not only physical pain and discomfort... it would have limited her outlook on the world... and impacted the way that the world viewed her. Because the woman's face would have been obscured by the fabric that draped down from the back of her head towards the ground, others might only have recognized the woman by her crooked silhouette... if they recognized her at all. Too often in history, society has pushed the sick and disabled into the margins and into invisibility, sidelining and separating them from the rest of the community. The woman's view of the world would have been pretty much devoid of human eye contact, devoid of the ability to look up and catch the flight of a swallow or of getting lost in the beauty of a starry night sky.

The woman did not seek Jesus out. She may not even have known who he was. Jesus finds her and says, simply, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood straight and began praising God.” As in other stories of healing that we find in the Bible, the woman not only knows release from her affliction, she is no longer a social outcast. The woman is healed and restored to her full stature in the community.

An indignant synagogue leader then began protesting to the crowd, issuing the equivalent of a religious citation to Jesus for healing on the sabbath. The woman had been bent over for a very long time. Why could she not be healed on another day? ...asks the synagogue leader. Jesus’ actions are clearly an affront to religious legalism, a challenge to the rigid focus on rules rather than on a broader understanding of God’s presence and purpose. We know, well, the importance and gift of sabbath rest... the God-given opportunity to cease from our labors... to lay down all the “should and oughts” that we carry... and to live fully... for a time... in the restful splendor of God’s presence. Beautiful sabbath traditions include spending quality time with family and friends. Sabbath restrictions are against doing anything that is deemed to be “work.” Resting from work allows for a deeper focus on one’s relationship with God and with one another. Jesus isn’t seeking to abolish God’s commandment to observe sabbath rest. It may be that his concept of attending to God’s presence included the imperative to heal, release, and free those who are in need... at whatever time of the day or week. In the temple that day, Jesus did what he was drawn to do. Jesus did what he was born to do.

We all carry burdens. Some burdens are heavier than others. Some burdens are visible and known to others. Other burdens may be carried out of sight... hidden in silence... burdens such as the weight of shame, or feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, and invisibility.

An important part of my life story is that I grew up in a family in which both my mother and my brother suffered from mental illness, a topic near and dear to my heart. I was the first born. Mom’s schizophrenia emerged after she gave birth to my brother Roger. About every two years, Mom’s symptoms would get worse requiring hospitalizations. There is much to Mom’s story... and to the experience of being a child of someone who suffered mightily. In any case, this family experience helped form me into the person I am today. For now, the image that I would like to share is that of my Mom when, in her 50’s, she began to walk with her face towards the ground. I don’t believe... that at the time... Mom was suffering from a spinal problem. The effects of osteoporosis would set in later. I believe that it was the voices of her schizophrenia... telling her that she was no good... that weighed her down as if she were carrying the huge, heavy burden of feeling utterly unworthy... a burden that was difficult for her body to bear. Years later, Mom entered the last chapter of her journey, living 15 years in a nursing home where her primary caregiver was a woman named Miriam. I remember the caregiver’s name because Miriam was also the name of Moses’ sister. What Miriam offered my mother, on any given day of the week, was healing touch and compassionate care, even as Mom continued her slow descent towards death. As much as we, in the family, loved and cared about Mom, it was clear that the presence of family members triggered Mom’s inner voices of unworthiness. It was difficult for us to be helpful.... and it was comforting to know that Mom was being tenderly bathed... and fed... and cared for by a woman who clearly put her at ease. Miriam was able to lighten Mom’s burden and help her know healing on her journey out of this world and into the next. The love of God is woven into this story.

At its best, church should be a place of spacious welcome and healing... a place that does not shy away from pain... a place where the broken and the healed... all of us who are “in process”... come together to worship and praise God. Church is to be a place of renewal where we are reminded of our inherent worth and dignity... reminded of our belovedness that has been from the very beginning... a community of patient listening... a fellowship where joy and struggle can coexist side-by-side... a place where we are restored to that most basic, most essential understanding of what it means to belong to God and to one another... that we may unbend... stand tall... find our voices.... That we may be strengthened to offer our healing presence and care wherever we find ourselves in the world. At its best, the church is a community of healing where pain is transformed into deeper compassion... a place that helps equip disciples for their work of radical, sacrificial hospitality, welcome and service.

None of us is immune from pain... be it physical, emotional, or spiritual. God seeks to transform our pain that we may grow in compassion and understanding... that we may heal and grow in order to better serve others in God’s name. A wise teacher of mine, Flora Wuellner, has written, in God’s voice:

I abide with you.  
 I rejoice with you.  
 I suffer with you.  
 I heal you.  
 I awaken you.  
 I transform you  
 I transform through you.<sup>1</sup>

We come together to be the church...  
 a community of God’s own...  
 that gathers in a sacred space to worship...  
 to remember God’s unwavering faithfulness.

We seek to be a safe and welcoming community where all  
 are invited to lay down their burdens,  
 and know nourishment, healing, and renewal...  
 a community of the broken and the blessed  
 who come together to be strengthened  
 for the work of returning to the world  
 as living expressions of God’s love...  
 a community that gathers to praise God...  
 in the name of Christ Jesus...  
 the one who calls the world to abundant life...

*Amen...*

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<sup>1</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Prayer, Stress & Our Inner Wounds*, The Upper Room Pub., 1985, pg. 84.