

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## The Truth Will Set You Free!

Luke 13:10-17

Sunday, May 1, 2022

*Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor*

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There are a few things more embarrassing than when parents tell stories about what we said and did as kids. So, kids, watch out! Your parents have great memories. I know my mom does. Here I am a grown adult and we will be with a group at dinner and my mom will say, "I remember when Charley was ten he said the funniest thing..." I think, "Oh no, here we go again." I blush and everybody gets a kick out of it.

A colleague of mine likes to do the same thing with his adult daughter. He likes to tell one story about something she did when she was five years old. There was a big thunderstorm one day. It was lightning and thundering like crazy, pouring down rain. He couldn't find his daughter. So, he ran upstairs to her room to find her.

When he got to her room, his little girl was standing on the window sill, pressed against the glass, with thunder roaring and lightning flashing outside. He said, "Jennifer, what are you doing?" She said, "Dad, I think God is trying to take my picture" (story by Tony Campolo).

That's a great thought, isn't it? God taking pictures. If God does take pictures, I would like to see the kind of camera he uses! I would also hope that he takes pictures of us when we are at our best, not our worst.

I see the New Testament gospels as God's best snapshots of Jesus – the ones he really wants us to see. I see the gospels as God's scrapbook of Jesus – showing us different scenes of Jesus' life to teach us what Jesus is all about.

There is a picture of Jesus in Luke that I really want you to see. It is the picture we find in our scripture lesson for today. Only Luke has this picture of Jesus. No other gospels have it. It is really special. It is the picture of Jesus laying hands on a woman as she stands up straight for the first time in 18 years. It is a picture of Jesus healing a woman who has been in bondage for 18 years. It is a picture of Jesus setting free a woman who has been oppressed for 18 years.

And it is a special picture because it shows us the heart of Jesus and what he came to do. In this picture the heart of Jesus is showing.

I am sure the woman woke up and went to worship on the Sabbath that day like she always did. I am sure she had accepted her condition. After all, she had it for 18 years. But she had no idea what was going to happen to her that day.

She slowly made her way to the synagogue. I see her family helping her up the stair of the synagogue because she she could only see the ground below her. She couldn't see Jesus teaching. But he could see her. Jesus was moved by her. And he called her over and laid his hands on her and said, "Woman, you are set free from this bondage." Immediately, she stood up straight and began to praise God.

Church I want you to see something here. Notice that the woman did not ask Jesus to heal her. Notice that the woman did not interrupt Jesus as he was teaching to make a request. Notice the woman did not seek Jesus out. Notice the woman did not show a sign that she had great faith or that she somehow deserved the healing. No, Jesus saw her from afar and sought her out. He didn't ask her where she was from. He didn't ask her if she understood the Trinity. Jesus simply saw her oppression, her bondage, and wanted her to be free, and he set her free indeed.

Church, there is a revolution in this picture of Jesus. For this woman was not only set free from the bondage of her crippling condition; she was also set free from the oppression she was under as a woman. At the time of this healing, women were considered property of men. Men were not allowed to talk to women or to associate with them. Women were considered second class citizens.

And Jesus came along and said, "I'm here to change all that." And he called this woman out, put her in the middle of the synagogue and said, "Woman, stand up straight! You are daughter of Abraham. I set you

free from your sickness. I set you free from your oppression. Stand up straight! I give you back your dignity!"

If there is one thing I know about Jesus, it is that he came to free the oppressed, to liberate the enslaved, to set loose those who have been bound up. This is what Jesus is about. We see this especially in Luke. From his first sermon announcing that he came to set the captive free, to his teachings, to his miracles, to his crucifixion, to his resurrection, Jesus is about liberating the oppressed.

Maybe as you look at this picture of Jesus today you can identify with this lady who could not stand up straight. Maybe you have been crippled by sin. Maybe you have been brought low by addiction. Maybe you are bent over by resentment and anger. Maybe you have bowed down to negativity. Maybe you can't stand up straight because you have no dignity anymore.

Oh, let me tell you the good news today. Jesus sees you. He sees you bent over and he is calling you out today. He is ready to set you free. He is ready to liberate you. He is ready to empower you to stand up straight and be the person he has called you to be. Just come to him. Let him touch you. He will set you free!

I want everybody to hear this message today because there is a power at work in the world that doesn't want me to be preaching this to you. There is a power at work in the world that doesn't want you to know that you can be set free. There is a power at work in the world that wants you to remain oppressed and discouraged. There is a power at work in the world that shatters every time I mention the word Jesus. And that power is evil.

Oh, you don't hear about the reality of evil very much anymore from the pulpit. Evil likes that because it likes to go undetected. But make no mistake, evil is out there. Now, I don't believe the devil is behind every bush and tree, but I do believe there is a force out there that tries to do everything it can to keep the world bound up, enslaved and oppressed.

Don't worry. Jesus came not only to free the oppressed but to shatter the evil forces that create oppression. He did it in our text. Jesus said the woman was bound by Satan for 18 years. He shattered evil's hold on her. And on the cross Jesus defeated evil once and for all, and now until Kingdom comes it is just a mopping up effort. But, you see, evil is a sore loser throwing a big pity party. Evil is a sore loser telling lies and making empty

threats. Evil is a sore loser doing all it can to keep people bound up. And evil is very crafty.

Rev. Allen remembers talking with a missionary he met one time. He worked in third world countries. He was a well-educated physician who felt called by God to be a missionary. He explained to my friend that in primitive cultures he often encountered demon possession and was involved in exorcisms. My friend asked, "How come we don't really encounter any of that in America?" The missionary replied, "More sophisticated demons."

Evil is crafty. Here in America evil disguises itself in greed, in poverty, in bigotry, prejudice and violence. Evil works through drug addiction and the breakdown of the family. Evil works through many of our systems that oppress people and keep them down.

But you want to know one of evil's favorite places to work? The church, religious institutions. We see it in our text for today. The leader had become so legalistic, so proud, so rigid about the Sabbath, that he was blind to God's work in Christ of setting someone free from oppression. The text says he was indignant with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

You see evil loves nothing more than when it can get people of faith so distracted and preoccupied that they forget their mission. The church is one of evil's favorite targets because we have the truth.

C.S. Lewis wrote about this in "The Screwtape Letters." In the book Screwtape is a senior devil who coaching his nephew Wormwood on how to get recruits from earth for Screwtape's kingdom below. Here is Screwtape's advice: "The church [itself] is a fertile field if you just keep them bickering over details, structure, organization, money, property, personal hurts and misunderstandings. But one thing you must prevent: Don't ever let them look up and see the banners flying, for if they ever see the banners flying you have lost them forever."

In our text for today we see the banners flying. We see Jesus wins, overthrowing the forces of evil and setting the free the oppressed. We see a glimpse of what Jesus did on the cross and what we will experience when the Kingdom of God is fully established – victory over the evil forces of this world.

So, claim the life Jesus has for you! Tell Satan he is a

liar and will no longer oppress you. Tell Satan, not today. Victory is mine! You are a child of the King!

Fred Craddock tells a story about vacationing with his wife one summer in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. One night they found a quiet little restaurant, where they looked forward to a private meal.

While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. Craddock leaned over and whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." He didn't want anyone intruding on their privacy.

But sure enough, the man did come over to their table. "Where you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice.

"Oklahoma," Craddock answered.

"Splendid state, I hear, although I've never been there," the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?"

"I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University," Craddock replied.

"Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a story to tell you." And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly and thought to himself, "Oh, no! Here comes another preacher story! It seems like everybody has at least one." The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ben Hooper," he said. "I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn't married when I was born, so I had a pretty hard time.

When I started to school, my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn't a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and lunch time because the things they said to me cut me so deep. What was worse was going to town on Saturday afternoons and feeling like every eye was burning a hole through me, wondering just who my father was.

"When I was about 12 years old, a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in the church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking right at me.

'Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?' he asked. I felt this big weight coming down on me. It was like a big black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down.

But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. 'Wait a minute!' he said. 'I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God.' With that he slapped me across the rump and said, 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Stand up straight and go and claim it.'

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, "Those were the most important words anybody ever said to me, and I've never forgotten them." Then he said goodbye and left the restaurant. The waitress said to Craddock, "Don't you know who that was? That was Ben Hooper – two term Governor of Tennessee."

Stand up straight! You are a child of the King! Amen.



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097  
770-497-8215 [www.johnscreekumc.org](http://www.johnscreekumc.org)