

## **Luke 13:10-17**

13:10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

13:11 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.

13:12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

13:13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

13:14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day."

13:15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?"

13:16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

13:17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

## Sermon: Awake and Then Some

Awake. Alert. Affectionate. Actionable.

That's the movement of today's text. Let's start with awake.

Jesus is woke, y'all. I'll say it again: "Jesus is woke." Call the DEI police on me if you must, but cultural and political demands cannot, will not change the truth. We've worked our way through thirteen chapters of Luke, and Jesus, through every bit of it, has been awake to the needs of others. Something transcendent has happened. Jesus left those baptismal waters, and he spent a period of discernment in the wilderness, and he came back resolved to identify the places in this world where systems are failing humanity, where systems are stealing the dignity of God and neighbor.

I'm not making this up. Jesus went back to Nazareth, he opened the scroll of Isaiah, and he said "I've come, y'all, because the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and They have anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus recognizes that the powers-that-be, in this instance, the Roman authorities, are working their hardest to deny a great swath of the population their God-given rights and their God-deeded possibilities. Jesus is awake to the fact that the world is not equitable and just for too many of his neighbors.

But Jesus is not simply content to be aware of injustice in the world. Awareness is vital, and often hard-earned, but it cannot be an end in and of itself. Jesus transfers his awareness into alertness.

Jesus travels the whole of the Galilee region, and every day he notices how the centuries-old traditions and rituals of faith-practice have weaponized Torah. Instead of Torah becoming a covenant of collaboration between God and ALL Humanity and ALL creation, it's reduced to a winnowing fork or a funnel. God becomes limited. Community becomes exclusive. Large swaths of creatures and creation are walled off in a state of constant invisibility.

Jesus is alert to this trend on a personal and household level. And today's story is a textbook example. There's a nameless woman who suffers from chronic back pain. That's our first clue. She's nameless. A little later this year, we will read about Lazarus and Bartimaeus. Their pain is no less severe, their isolation no less glaring, and yet they have names. So...this person's status as a woman already marginalizes her. Unlike the men, she is not permitted to enter the meetinghouse on Sabbath, nor is it socially acceptable to have personal contact with a rabbi.

And then there's her chronic illness. In Jesus' day and age, her affliction is evidence of her faith deficiency. She is expected to stand aside, be invisible, disappear from the consciousness of those who are deemed more worthy: the healthy, righteous, and faithful.

This woman experiences physical and emotional pain, and a constant state of isolation and marginalization. She is shut out from the presence of community, and by extension, all that is divine and sacred.

Jesus is alert. He notices this woman's plight. He notices her experience in relation to those around her.

Jesus' alertness gives way to affection. When we remove all the artificial nonsense – all those things that seek to set people apart rather bring them together – we see the humanity in one another. We have empathy. We have compassion. We can visualize or imagine what it's like to walk in another's footsteps. And the empathic DNA – the positive component of Darwin's *Origin of Species* that too often goes unmentioned – takes hold. We love our neighbors. And we know that we must also *BE* neighbors to one another.

Therefore, Jesus' affection leads to action. Jesus considers what power or privilege or resource he has at his disposal that can be used to aid his neighbor. He can see her. He can know her. He can heal her. He can welcome her back into community. He can help her regain an awareness of what's always been true: She is a child of God, and God is present in her life.

So Jesus greets her, engages her, consults with her, offers his healing, offers his affirmation, and does ALL of this in the most public of ways.

I want to add something else to this description. So often, we tell the story, or interpret the story, as if Jesus comes along, and places the God-Stuff in and among the people he encounters. But that's not so. Jesus doesn't "put" divinity into people. Jesus draws out the divine spark in others. Jesus cultivates spaces where people can see for themselves their own divine spark within, and upon seeing that spark, seize all the capacities and possibilities of their created goodness. But best of all, Jesus is not intimidated by, jealous or skeptical of,

threatened by the creations and expressions that each new person brings to God's revealed kinship.

It's this openness, this profoundness, this radical inclusion that's a bridge too far for the power structures of his time. The leader of the Synagogue is none too pleased about healings that happen outside of established business hours, nor privileges afforded to the non-privileged, nor a community intent on expansiveness. And one day soon, he'll rally the defenses of the status quo, who are still foolish enough to believe that a cross can put an end to God's radical hospitality and inclusion.

On any given Sunday, I'm not seeking to read our scriptures through a political lens, though sadly, we exist in a time where everything is made to be political. What I am seeking to do, earnestly, each week is to view our texts through a moral lens and through a faith lens. What do the stories of Jesus teach me about the identity and character of God? For me, they always reveal that God is overwhelmingly decent, overwhelmingly good, overwhelmingly affectionate and present to and for Their creation, and wholly infused in the giftedness and possibilities of ALL humanity. And for me, the measure of our morality, of our sense of right and wrong, is a simple guidepost: do our actions promote the love of God and neighbor?

So again, I believe it's imperative that we follow the example Jesus modeled in today's story: We must always be awake and aware to the systems, traditions, and isms that run counter to the inclusive kinship to which we covenant with God, neighbor, and land.

We must be alert to the people and places in our daily lives marginalized by unjust systems. We must model a lived and practiced

empathy for everyone and everything in our ecosystems that results in a felt compassion by our neighbors. And we must act. We must act in ways that make our neighbors seen, heard, valued, and credentialed in every capacity.

I have known and experienced the love of God revealed in the life of Jesus. And I know this love, because Jesus came into this world the child of a complicated relationship between two refugee parents, both brown-skinned and Palestinian by the way, one of whom was an unwed teenage mother. They nurtured him in such a way that he recognized divine community in the company of tax collectors, sharecroppers, day laborers, fishermen, shepherds, strong-willed and even stronger-minded women, centurions, those possessed by demons, even traitors.

He dared to offer healing, voice, and community to lepers, children, and widows, and all manner of persons dealing with a range of chronic illnesses. He revealed God's kinship in stories of Samaritans, and sons lost in wanderlust, and the mite of widows, and even wee little men who climbed tall sycamore trees.

And in the future, his story will be championed by heroes of whom society still chooses to remain skeptical: women telling of rolled away stones, eunuchs from far-off and mighty kingdoms recognizing baptismal waters, even zealots transformed on the Damascus Road.

The very ones we have held up as the defenders, protectors, and inspiration of faith for the last two millennia, are also the very ones who would find themselves marginalized, stigmatized, and excluded from the majority of communities in our nation in 2025.

**Awake and Then Some**  
**Pentecost Eleven, 8/24/2025**  
**Bob Stillerman**  
**Luke 13:10-17**



To believe the Gospel is to believe in the unlimited possibility and potential of every created being. To live the Gospel, is to be a community of advocates – those who are awake, alert, affectionate, and actionable – to the needs of our neighbors. Those who see them, hear them, welcome them, affirm them into the love of God, even on, especially on Sabbath. And even when, especially when, the leader of the Synagogue would rather we not.

Good friends, may we be found faithful. Amen.