

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent and quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman you are loosed from your infirmity.' He laid his hands on her and immediately she stood up straight and began praising God."

In those four brief verses, Luke tells us a great deal about the life of faith. You can hardly imagine a more vivid picture of helplessness than the one suggested by Luke's story about the Kyphotic Woman. Kyphotic. The original Greek word used to describe her gives a fascinating clue to what Luke wants us to see. The word translates as not just "bent" or "bent over," but a better translation would be "bent together" or "bent with." This is a woman who is bent in on herself. She is not just a woman with an infirmity but, as Luke says, with the spirit of an infirmity. Whatever it was that had bent her, whatever emotional or physical burden she had, it ultimately became part of her until her very body was conformed to its image. There is nothing she can do now to help herself out of the spiritual pretzel her life has become. As I thought about this "bent together" woman I tried to imagine how she went about her life, how did she manage being so turned in on herself? I wondered what it would be like day after day, going through life forever

bent over, looking always at my feet and never up at the blue sky or a starry night, not being able to see people's faces.

Can you imagine living like that? How would you do things? How would the gardens get tended, the house cleaned, groceries shopped for? How would you dress yourself in the morning, eat a meal, wash your hair or brush your teeth? How would you interact with people you meet, how would you hug your children or grand children.

The scripture today does not tell us much about this woman. She is simply known as "the bent woman". For eighteen long years, she had been getting worse and worse, so disabled by her bad back that she couldn't stand up straight and could hardly walk. She had become her disability.

Will you pray with me please? May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Luke offers us the opportunity to look at ourselves and ask "how am I bent? How am I incomplete, less than whole? What weighs me down? What leaves me bent and burdened? How does Jesus respond to you, to me, to all the "bent ones"? That last one is an important question, for those who want to follow Jesus? How

does Jesus respond to all of us who are bent?

The key is in his response to the “bent woman”. What did Jesus do when she intruded into his life that day in the synagogue? First, he saw her. He noticed her. He realized and acknowledged that there was an actual person in front of him. He didn’t look right past her, He saw her! And when Jesus saw her, he touched her, the bent over woman whom no one had probably touched in years! And after he touched her, he named her. When the leader of the synagogue protested—it was the Sabbath, after all, and no good Jew would perform work on the Sabbath!—Jesus retorted. “You’d rescue your livestock on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you? Then why not a daughter of Abraham who has suffered for so many years? No longer “the bent woman,” she was now a “daughter of Abraham”. She was no different from the synagogue leader, the other worshippers, the disciples, or you and me: she was, above all else, a child of God! SHE BELONGED TO GOD! This poor, crippled, ridiculed woman was granted the same dignity as all the rest of God’s people for all the centuries since Abraham and Sarah became partners in the covenant. And that name far outweighed the burden of her illness, the pain of being ignored and shoved aside for eighteen long years!

And what did the woman do? She stood up straight! For the first time in years, the woman was able to lift her head up with dignity and hope! Why? Because he had seen her, spoken to her, touched her, healed her, and named her. Jesus

reminded the woman of the truth and she and everyone around her had forgotten, SHE WAS A PRECIOUS, BELOVED CHILD OF GOD! The woman stood up straight, and responded to Jesus with grateful, joyful praise. She didn't claim credit for her own well-being. She didn't doubt, didn't get skeptical, didn't say "thanks" and walk away; no, she stood up straight and praised God for the wonderful things Jesus had done!

Because of Jesus, she was able to live as a new person, live in God's new reality, live as a somebody when once she was a nobody. Because of Jesus, the woman was set free; Jesus empowered the woman to stand up straight, all because he recognized her as a person, recognized her need, and granted her wholeness and healing.

Beloved Child of God. Isn't that our name, too? In Baptism, the word of promise was spoken over us when we received the water and the Word: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever!" So stand up straight! There is nothing that can completely bend you over or knock you down, because you are a child of God! Stand up straight! You have a name!

I think we forget that sometimes, we have this amazing ability to love everyone but ourselves. We have an amazing ability to hold onto to grudges, to angers to hurts, it is hard to forgive others and consequently harder to forgive

ourselves and we lose sight of who we are and whose we are until we too are bent over and bent in on ourselves.

When the woman stood up straight, after all those years, she praised God. And that is what we need to do too. When God does something great and wonderful—something like create a universe, send a Savior, fill us with the Holy Spirit, establish a rule of justice and peace, forgive sin, destroy death—when God does that, basically each and every day, we are set free and empowered to stand up straight, and praise God!

Stand up straight, and act like it! That’s what a child of God does. Today Jesus says to us and to all the “bent ones” of the world, “Stand up straight! You are a child of God! You are free from all that enslaves you! You are empowered to live abundantly, to live a life of praise and service to God!” Today Jesus sees us, calls out to us, touches us, makes us whole, gives us a name.

One of my favorite movies is Toy Story, there is a scene in the movie when Woody, a toy cowboy confronts toy astronaut Buzz Lightyear with the fact that Buzz is not a real space hero. In frustration Woody yells at Buzz, “You’re not a Space Ranger! You’re an action figure—a child’s plaything”

Buzz pompously brushes Woody aside and proceeds with his mission to fly to infinity and beyond! But when he fails to fly, Buzz realizes the truth of

Woody's statement, and with his head hung with despair he declares, "I'm just a stupid, little, insignificant toy." As Woody tries to comfort his friend, he reminds him about the love of the boy who owns them both and he tells Buzz, "You must not be thinking clearly. Look over in that house, there's a kid who thinks you're the greatest, and it's not because you're a space ranger, it's because you're his." He tells Buzz to look at the bottom of his foot, and as Buzz lifts his foot to look, he sees a label affixed to his shoe. There in black permanent marker is the name Andy, the little boy to whom he belongs. When he sees Andy's name Buzz breaks into a big smile and he takes on a new and determined confidence.

I would like to ask you to try something with me. Please look at the bottom of your shoe, and imagine for a moment that there is a label there and in black permanent marker it says GOD. The next time you feel rejected and dejected, the next time you feel like you are bent together I want you to look at the bottom of your shoe and tell yourself. "I must not be thinking clearly, God thinks I am the greatest, not because of what I do or don't do, but because I belong to God. So Stand up Straight! Hallelujah, Amen

