

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: When Jesus Saw Her

Lesson: Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

¹⁵ The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

(Slide 1) About two weeks ago, I attended a class as part of my continuing education. In that class, the instructor divided the board into three sections. In the first section, we were asked to write down the image of God we had when we were children. In the second section, we wrote about the image of God we had as teenagers or young adults. And in the third section, we wrote about the image of God we have most recently in our lives.

The students were given a few minutes to recall their memories, and then one by one they came forward to write down their images of God. What was fascinating was that not a single image overlapped with another. Perhaps that is because our lives are all different, and therefore the way we have each experienced God is also different.

When it came to the childhood images of God, there were many answers: one student wrote "old man like KFC," another wrote "Santa." As for myself, since I was reading comic books about Greek mythology in elementary school, I wrote "Zeus."

Then we shared the images of God we had as teenagers. The answers were again diverse: “teacher of right & wrong,” “a comforting older sibling,” “storyteller.” For me, my teenage years were a time of spiritual wandering. Church felt “old fashioned” to me, and since I was interested in science, I often doubted the stories in the Bible. Naturally, I also doubted God. Although I went to church every Sunday because of my parents, I struggled with questions like, “Why do I have to go to church?” and “Why should I pray?” During that time, my father and I would read the Gospels together for about 30 minutes a day. So, the image of God I had back then was Jesus—Jesus at the table with his disciples.

And then, more recently, when the students shared their images of God, the answers included “Abba,” “friend,” “advisor,” “womb/incubator,” and even “sassy.” For me, because I had surgery recently and was in a period of recovery, I wrote “invisible healer.” Another image I hold is “listener,” because I love sitting alone in the darkened sanctuary during the week. I often sing hymns by myself and pour out my unorganized thoughts and feelings to God. So to me, God is a listener.

Friends, what is your image of God? In your life, what kind of God have you experienced? Perhaps during fellowship or another time you could share these with one another. Since each of our lives is different, so too the images of God we hold are different. The Bible itself presents us with many different images of God through stories and parables.

And today, in Luke 13, we encounter yet another image of God.

(Slide 2) In Luke 13, we see Jesus teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. His teaching carried authority, so many people were gathered there to hear him. Among them was a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. Because of her condition, she could not stand up straight and lived bent over.

As you know, the spine is incredibly important to the human body. When it is injured or broken, it causes immense pain, sometimes paralysis, and even if it heals, it can leave lasting weakness and difficulty. Life becomes very uncomfortable. This woman had lived with such pain and difficulty for eighteen long years. Surely, she longed to be healed. Surely, she came faithfully to the synagogue, praying earnestly to God. But no one there paid her any attention. No one considered her important.

Even as Jesus was teaching, she sat quietly in the corner of the synagogue, likely hidden from view by the crowd, simply listening to Jesus’ words.

(Slide 3) Do you ever use the expressions “I hear you” or “I feel you” in daily life? We use those words when we deeply understand someone’s experience, when we almost feel as if we have lived through it ourselves.

That woman thought she was listening to Jesus. But do you know the truth? The one who was truly listening was not her—it was Jesus. Verse 12 says, “When Jesus saw her...” This was not just a passing glance. The moment Jesus saw her, he truly heard her, he truly felt her. Even though she never spoke aloud, Jesus heard the entirety of her life. He heard her sorrow, her pain, her unspoken frustration, her years of humiliation.

So, before she ever said a word to him, before she ever asked for healing, Jesus already knew the deep longing of her heart—the desire to be free, to be made whole, to stand tall and live with dignity. Jesus called her forward in front of everyone, laid his hands on her, and immediately freed her from all the oppression and bondage that had weighed her down.

Friends, this is who God is—a true listener. God hears us before we even speak. God feels us before we even know how to put our feelings into words.

Some people in the synagogue rejoiced with the woman at her healing. But not everyone. The synagogue leader, and those with him, were indignant. Even in this joyful moment, they focused only on the fact that Jesus had broken the Sabbath law by healing her.

(Slide 4) But Jesus answered them, “Don’t you untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath and lead it to water? Then shouldn’t this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day?”

So friends, what image of God do you discover in this story? Perhaps God as a teacher, teaching with authority in the synagogue. Or God as a healer, restoring a woman who had suffered for eighteen years. Or perhaps, like me, God as a listener, hearing the depths of our lives before we even speak. Or maybe God as the one who awakens those who were trapped in the mere forms of the Law, reminding them that the fulfillment of the Law is life and love. Perhaps there are other images of God that came to you as you heard this story.

Two weeks ago in that class, one student wrote “many peoples” as his image of God. That sparked curiosity in all of us, so the instructor asked the student to explain. The student said, “Because we are all created by God, made in the image

of God, the image of God is not fixed in one way. As we follow Christ and grow in holiness, God's goodness shines through us. So I see God in people."

I think his answer is a wonderful invitation for us to build the kingdom of God together. God sent us Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ made us his disciples. And now he sends us back into the world.

Just as Jesus called that woman forward in the synagogue and set her free from her oppression, so too we are sent into the world to reach out to those who are still ignored, still oppressed, still bent over by the burdens of life. Guided by the Holy Spirit, may we extend to them the warm hand of Christ's love.

When we listen attentively to someone's story, when we extend compassion, when we honor and lift up the oppressed, in that very moment people will see the image of God through us. And when we live this way, the kingdom of God will no longer be a faraway place—it will be revealed here, in our lives and in our community.

I believe this with all my heart, and I bless you all in the name of the Lord. Amen.