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Set Free

Luke 13:10-17
Isaiah 58:9b-14

And everyone rejoiced at the marvels Jesus was accomplishing! Praise God!

Healing is real. If we haven't knowingly experienced divine healing ourselves, then perhaps we've witnessed it. We've almost certainly heard stories of miraculous healing from others.

Healing was clearly a well known and important part of Jesus' ministry. There are dozens of passages in the Bible that talk about Jesus healing people.

But healing is not always what we expect. Sometimes it doesn't seem to happen or comes in an unexpected way. It is important to remember that the Spirit can provide healing even when we don't realize it. It is important to trust that God is at work in every situation.

Healing can take many forms and shapes.
Healing can be spiritual, or physical, or mental.
Healing can be for an individual, or a relationship, or a group, or a church.
Healing can be for people or animals or the earth.
And when seeking one kind of healing, we may end up with something we didn't expect.

We ourselves don't always know what is possible or what is really best. God knows and we need to trust that the God of Love is always working for the greatest good in the world.

Let's consider the woman in today's Gospel reading. She had spent 18 years bent over with sickness. One scholar notes that Jesus calling her a daughter of Sarah and Abraham stresses her membership in the Jewish covenant community. The commentator goes on to speculate, that because of her illness, there is a strong likelihood that her community was responsible for her care.[1]

When Jesus sets her free of her infirmity, she is rightfully overjoyed at being able to stand up straight and praises God. And I love the language of healing being a setting free, a release from bondage. But with freedom comes change and responsibility.

We don't know anything, really, about this woman that Jesus healed, but if she was being cared for by her community or even her family, think about how much her life would have changed upon being suddenly healed.

She may now need to support herself after 18 years of relying on others.
Her entire routine would change.
She could do more and would probably be expected to do more.
Perhaps her relationships would change.
Some, like her caregivers, might move out of her life.
Others might move into her life.

Having been healed, having been set free, it is easy to imagine that almost everything in her life might change as a result. Hopefully, good, satisfying change, but change nonetheless.

We don't always know how we will receive healing or liberation from our ails and demons or what it might mean in the long run. Or even what form it may take. We may not get a physical

1 Jeannine K. Brown at http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=8/22/2010

healing from something that ails us be instead we may get a spiritual healing that gives us the strength to deal with the physical issues.

But whatever the case, trust that God is working in every situation. That God does heal. Liberation is possible. And that God-given freedom brings change and change is opportunity for something good to happen.

It is also quite interesting that this story of healing we read tonight is also a story about keeping the Sabbath. Jesus tells us that the Sabbath is an appropriate time for healing.

The Sabbath is a day to honor and be with God, a day of rest and rejuvenation. A day to leave work and material things behind and concentrate on our relationship with the divine.

But Jesus reminds us that healing is not work. Healing is a release from our shackles, whatever they may be. There is no better day for liberation than God's day.

In the reading from Isaiah, the Jews have just returned from exile. And they reminded that God is present with them – God says "I am here" – if they give themselves to removing injustice and oppression in the world.

If they give themselves to justice, God will guide them and give relief in the barren, desert places in life. God will give strength and nourishment. I think we can rightfully hear that as saying that God will heal them, set them free and bring them to wholeness.

And Isaiah closely couples justice with the Sabbath. If we honor God by keeping the Sabbath, by making one day of the week about God and others and not our own selfish pursuits, then Isaiah tells us we will find happiness.

The Sabbath is a day of healing. A day of being set free. Healing is real. Healing may not come in the form prayed for, but trust that God is working in all things. Turn to God in the spirit of the sabbath, unselfishly and seeking justice in the world, and trust God's work in your life.

Before we move into our next hymn and then a time to come to God seeking healing, I want to share some words on healing from Brian Taylor in his book "Becoming Human: Core Teachings of Jesus." <read from pages 132-134>