

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior! Amen.

It is good to be back again. I attended the **ELCA Churchwide Assembly** in Louisiana and I was so thankful to be part of this great Assembly as it is the primary decision making body of the church. Before every voting on issue, we pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us. The worships were enlightening and moving. The preachers were marvelous. We had communion every day during the week long meeting at the worship service at 11:00 am. This was the fourteenth Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA since its birth in 1988. Somehow, I run into many familiar faces members of the ELCA and people from abroad like Papua New Guinea or Africa and even young man from my homeland of Madagascar and many fellow former missionaries. I will share more in the Tidings about all the main decisions we voted on. But one of the most important discussions we had and we are all invited to participate in it this newly compiled document titled, "**Called Forward Together in Christ for the sake of the world.**" This is a paper about the future direction of the ELCA. I will make sure that you all have this document. The three – expressions of the church as the Congregations, the Synods and the Churchwide organization will have to answer the question of "**Who we are? Who is God calling to be? And what should be our top THREE priorities for the next five years?**"

I think that is enough about the Churchwide assembly meeting but let's go back to our gospel text of the day. Honestly, I like this text. It is one of my favorites. It has many good things for us to think about. I invite you to read it again and re-read it at your own convenience time this week, and find out some words or phrases that touched you the most. It is the story of a crippled unnamed woman being healed by Jesus on the Sabbath day and the whole drama that followed.

One thing that Jesus always does is not only healed the person but also reminded the person of their true identity. Jesus gives the crippled and unnamed woman a name. Jesus calls her "the daughter of Abraham." This name gives the woman the status of being a member of God's people, a member of the covenant community. Jesus sees her like any other person who was there.

Remember the story of the rich man, who was— the chief tax collector— the short man, in Luke 19:1-10, that was another person that Jesus calls "a son of Abraham"— That was Zacchaeus, the one who climbed a tree to see Jesus passing by and Jesus called him by name saying "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today! And afterward, Zacchaeus promised Jesus to give half of his possessions to the poor and he would pay back four times to those who he had defrauded. And Jesus replied, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost!"

I am amazed at the faith of this woman. She has been "*crippled for 18 years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight*" a detailed number of years that points to the seriousness and length of her suffering.

Whatever her ailment or her illness is, it controls her; it burdens her, bends her double, and locks her. For eighteen years she has been bent over, not able to see the sky, or look someone in the eye. Trinity members, this woman suffered, and yet **she did not miss church**. She had come to the place where the Word of God was taught and where God's people met together. She did not forsake the assembly of those who wanted God's blessing. And yes, Jesus saw her and called over, freed her and reminded her on how God loved her very much. Isn't that wonderful?

How God deals with us on an individual basis really strikes me on this gospel text today. Look at the three parts healing that Jesus did to this woman:

— First, he proclaims her free from her ailment which he later labels as Satan binding her for eighteen years.

— Second, he lays hands upon her.

—Third, she immediately stands up straight and begins praising God. (Luke 13:12-13)

If you read carefully, you will notice that the phrase “**stand up straight**” is written twice. First we are told what she is **absolutely unable to do so**. (verse 11) Then, we are told that she is **immediately able to do so** when Jesus lays hands on her (verse 13).

Here is the thing Trinity members; *the exact thing that she cannot do is precisely the thing Jesus empowers her to do*. Well, she came sorrowing but she went home rejoicing. She came suffering and she went home healed. She came with a burden but she went home singing and rejoicing and praising God. That is the power of Jesus when Jesus meets us where we are. Yes, my favorite statement again and I am not tired repeating it while the occasion arises. **God meets us where we are**. We don't have to be like somebody or someone else, but **be who you are, and Jesus sees you**. Coming to church is one way of encountering Jesus, and we are transformed, and we are renewed every day...

But nowadays, only 30% of the members of any churches attend Sunday's services for various reasons and if we attend services twice a month, then we are joining the group of the so called “Regular church goers.” But today, we are being reminded by the gospel text that whenever we are presents attending the Church on Sundays, we are hosted by Jesus himself. Jesus knows any of us. Jesus knows everything about our life and what is going on with each one of us. And yet, Jesus loves us and he wants to bless us, and to free us from all the bondages we have and renew us with the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of the everlasting life during the partaking of the Holy Communion meals and we are sent out after being fed, renewed and freed to share God's love in our daily life. That's why it is important for us to invite our families, and friends and especially our young people and young adult to come to church on Sundays so that they can experience and being blessed and freed as we all have and they can live out their baptismal identity to strive for justice and peace in the world and to share God's love with others.

We have a reminder today. We have something to do from today onward. We have to get busy inviting people to come to church. Hanson, the former Bishop of the ELCA, in his book “Faithfull and yet changing” wrote about how hard it is for us Lutherans to invite others to church. But we need to change he said. Statistically, people do come to church after receiving a third time invitations but he continued on that it took us Lutheran 23 years to invite someone, and we don't have 68 years to wait for a third invitation to be given to that same person.

And finally, I can't finish this sermon without saying a few words about the Sabbath. As we know for the Jews that the Sabbath Day was during Jesus' time and still is on Saturday, but we Christians celebrate the Sabbath Day on Sunday. It was on Sunday that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and we are eventually released from death itself. So, for us The Sabbath day or Sunday is all about freedom. Let us remember from today that Sunday is not a day of religious obligation. It's not about what we do for God. Sunday is about what God does for us and, recognizing that, what can we do for others?

Sunday is about remembering how God has freed us so that we may free others too. Sunday is the day to remember that God has freed us from death itself and our lives are in God's hand, and we can share God's work in our lives with others. Like the daughter of Abraham in our text today, we rejoice and praise God as we are set free.

Amen!

