

Today's Gospel reading takes place in synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus is teaching and all the sudden a woman appears. This woman was a troubled soul, she was very sick. The Bible says she was crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years. And now this woman comes to church, that's what synagogues were; she comes to church seeking healing.

We don't know much about this woman, we know that she's physically different. She is bent over not quite able to stand up straight. She's been like this for a very long time, probably searching for help, she most likely spent all of her possessions trying to get healed. She might have been still desperately looking; or maybe she has already given up all her hope, looking just for a quiet place to rest. (pause)

I know that many of **us** can see ourselves in this woman. Crippled by some kind of way, hurting and struggling, not able to find relief. And yes the truth is that we can walk and stand up straight, we don't look any different on the outside, but inside we are often times in very bad shape, we are bent over and have been bent over for so long that we don't really know how to straighten up anymore. And since others can't really see, we might have **start thinking** that it is ok to be crippled, that it is ok to suffer, for we might have brought this upon ourselves, or it's just the way life is.

Maybe these were the thoughts of the woman in the need of healing; I mean it has been long 18 years of suffering... But now there is something different. Someone came to town that might be of help. Someone she heard can truly heal, someone who can truly return strength, someone who can even bring the dead back to life. Oh yeah, she has heard of him, (pause) but never seen him in person, never heard him speak, never felt his presence. But now this someone is present in one of the synagogues, teaching, speaking about love of God for this hurting world, speaking about justice and salvation for all.

Have you heard of him? Do you know who I'm talking about? The greatest healer of all, the alpha and omega, the good shepherd, yes of course I'm talking about Jesus. And the reason why I am talking about Jesus in this way is because many of us have heard **of** Jesus, just like the woman in today's Gospel. Many of us have heard **about** his glorious deeds, about his death and resurrection, many of us have heard about the power of his Spirit... (pause) and yet we're still

held captive, we're still struggling inside with evil spirits, we're still searching for answers, for healing, for a new life. This is the reality of our lives. (pause)

We don't know how the woman heard of Jesus, we don't know if someone told her about him being at this particular synagogue, but one thing we know for sure, that this woman was sick of being sick. She was done being crippled; she was done with the way her life was and she realized that this might be the day when her whole life can change, for Jesus was in the house. And so she did make that big leap of faith, no matter how uncomfortable it might have been, she was willing to become exposed and vulnerable in the presence of Jesus and the community of faith. The reading says, *"And just then there appeared a woman and when Jesus saw her, he called her over, he laid his hands upon her and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."*

Jesus is here in this place, (pause) in his name we gathered today, he's here and he calls every single one of us to come to him for he wants to lay his hands upon us, (pause) he wants to set us free from our ailments, our sicknesses, our worries, our addictions, sins and doubts, he wants to give us freedom only he can give. The good news is that he's already here, he knows us by name, he chose us to be his children when he gave his life for us, when the price was paid and the victory of the cross won, Christ has done everything that needed to be done and now he extends his simple invitation. *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

The woman came and she has received Christ's gift of healing. She has come and finally found her peace. And her pain was changed into rejoicing and her spirit that was troubled was now praising God's name. She was able to stand up for nothing was crippling her life anymore. For Christ became her life.

Maybe you have been coming to this place for a long time, (pause) maybe you have been listening carefully about Jesus, about his love, and salvation, but you never found the strength, and courage to come to him personally, with everything that burdens you, with everything that cripples your life, and troubles your spirit. It is the toughest leap of faith we have to do, trusting God and putting our lives completely in his control, into his will and his power. Trust me, it still remains my biggest struggle, for I want to be in control, for I want to keep certain things to my

self, for I'm too ashamed for things I have done, for at times I'm concerned if God can love me just the way I am. (pause) If these are your struggles, today Jesus tells us, that no matter what it is, no matter how crippled we might feel, he can take it. He can handle it. For he is here for us.

I would like us to take a moment of silence right now, let's close our eyes and take a look at those things that **has been burdening our spirit**, things that **are holing us captive** and things that are **separating us from Christ**. Let's take a moment. (pause) Jesus says come, and I will set you free. (pause)

Please keep your eyes closed. I'd like to offer a prayer, and if you'd like, please repeat if after me: Dear Jesus, **I've been held captive** for so long, there are so many things in my life, that separate me from you. It's so hard to come to you, and to completely trust you. And yet today, I hear your invitation: "Come and I will set you free." Here I am Lord; I'm your forgiven child, please make me free again. Amen.

If you were able to pray the prayer, please let the peace of Christ to dwell in you richly, let him truly liberate you from everything that hinders you and experience the beauty of walking with him in a community of faith. If you haven't been able to pray today, continue to trust that the Lord keeps searching for you and your heart. His invitation stands and there is nothing in this world and beyond can separate you from his love. (pause)

There is one more thing I have to mention for it so significant in today's reading. And that is the reaction of us as a faith community to this unconditional invitation of Christ's love. For how we encounter Christ in our hearts, in our personal internal experience is one thing, but the other thing is how we continue to encounter him within a family of faith. See in today's reading this approach wasn't very friendly. The leader of the synagogue became angry that Jesus healed the women on a Sabbath day. The reason for that wasn't that he didn't want the woman to be healed, but because he was blinded by the man-made rules and laws about how the Sabbath day should be honored within the community of faith.

Sometimes we have our own ideas about a community of faith, about how and when it's appropriate to serve God, and to spend time with him and fellow brothers and sisters. Sometimes we'd like to even be in control how God should act among us, how and when his presence should be revealed and his power demonstrated. But that's not how it works, for God's love is

greater than our love, his acceptance is much bigger than ours, he sees beyond our human limited perspectives and all he wants us to do, is first to accept his love and healing and then reflect it and witness about it to those who come into our midst, to those who are around us.

And God gave us not one day, but seven days of the week to do so, to praise him daily with our lives, to love one another every hour of the day, to treat each other with dignity and respect, to look out for the needy and the poor and give thanks to God for all his blessings that he pours out upon us daily.

At the same time, God gave us his Sabbath day, the day of rest, the day to spend with him in his church, for he knew how busy our lives can be. My prayer is that this place, this church may be filled each Sunday as we come together as a community of faith to be with our Lord and to be with one another. Not for the sake of numbers, but for the sake of worship, for the sake of support, service and ministry, for the sake of witness, that God is in our hearts; that God is in this place and that **what we do in this place truly matters.**

And my prayer is that this place will always going to be a safe haven for all troubled, sick, and lonely souls. A place were people can come just the way they are, to find comfort, peace and love, to find Christ in our midst. For that's what Jesus makes us to be a sanctuary of love, acceptance and healing. Amen