

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our [Lord Jesus Christ!](#)

As was his custom, Jesus went to the synagogue for worship on the Sabbath. On that particular Sabbath, Jesus was teaching, and while looking at those gathered to worship, he saw a woman who had been crippled, bent over and unable to stand up straight, for eighteen years.

Just think that for nearly two decades, this woman spent every waking moment bent over. Going to the market, she could not look into the distance, she saw only the dirt path in front of her. Instead of seeing the faces of those passing by, she would have seen only dusty sandals and feet. We know that she was crippled by an [evil spirit](#), but we do not really know the nature of her ailment. Jesus laid hands on her and she straightened up, "set free" from her ailment, as we read in our Gospel this morning that she had "a spirit that had crippled her." We know that Jesus cured many things, but in this case, instead of noting that she was healed, the Greek reads that she was "loosed" from her ailment, while modern translations say she was "freed." At any rate, she has been unable to straighten up for eighteen years!

Now as you wander through the gospel of Luke, you will find another Sabbath story in the 6th chapter. In these particular verses, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled or withered. Now to have a shriveled right hand, was to be a social outcast in Jesus' day. You could not work, there was little you could do, besides beg. You certainly could not engage in any kind of social intercourse with your left hand. To have a withered right hand was to have a withered hand, and a withered life. "Stretch out your hand," Jesus said to the man. The man stretched out his hand, and it was restored. In this case, just like with the woman who was bent over in our Gospel this morning, there was no immediate danger to life, nothing that could not have waited until the following day. But Jesus gives us the great principle that it is always right to do good on the [Sabbath Day](#). Let us go back to the woman who could not straighten up, as I said earlier, we don't really know the medical nature of her affliction, all we know is that it was severe, and that for eighteen years, she must have had a very unpleasant perspective on life, walking around, looking at passing feet, unable to stand, or even sit up straight, unable to see the smiles on the faces of others, unable to see the green of the meadows after the rains.

This woman has what I have heard called a "post plague of locusts" syndrome. Not too long ago, in parts of southern Russia, there was a plague of locusts, literally billions of locusts, eating up everything that was green, reducing a farmer's crop to bare, brown earth. If they were to land on a lawn, they would eat the grass, and the thistles next door as well, if they land on a clothesline, they would eat the green spots out of a shirt. Locusts scorch the earth, they leave no living plant behind. A plague of locusts will emotionally and spiritually devastate a community, and that is how that woman must have felt: devastated. Her burden sucked the strength right out of her. Jesus saw her, and was moved, because he calls her forward, and he lays his hands upon her, and tells her: "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

Immediately, she straightened up and praised God!

Did you notice that Jesus did not tell her that he had solved her problem, he only tells her that she is set free from her burden. You are set free, stand up, and she believed Jesus, Jesus changed her life. The man with the withered hand also believed Jesus, when Jesus told him to stretch out his hand, he did not argue, he simply tried, and in the strength that Jesus gave him, he was successful. Neither the woman nor the man told Jesus "Lord, what you are telling me to do is impossible."

You know, it is interesting that the verses that immediately follow our Gospel this morning, are those that tell of the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. A tiny mustard seed will grow a plant nearly the size of a tree, while a tiny bit of yeast transforms bread dough. There is a non-biblical proverb, which I bet most of you have heard. It goes like this: "God never gives us more than we can handle." That proverb, of course, is false. There are problems that can crush the life out of us, we can be crushed to death. Sometimes it can take only a tiny problem to bend you over. Maybe you sometimes feel like you have a case of post-locust syndrome, you feel you live in a world with all the green of life sucked out, so listen to Jesus, when he tells you he has freed you from your burden. After all, one of the things Jesus is about in the world, is the business of straightening backs, and stretching out hands. Brothers and sisters, he is telling you this morning: "Stand tall, stretch out your hand, stretch yourself out. I have come to make you whole, if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!"

AMEN