

Luke 13:10–21 (NRSV)

¹⁰Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.” ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

¹⁸He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

²⁰And again he said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Do we truly live as whole people, in whom words and actions match up?

Reading Scripture is an art. We become better artists through practice and by reading in community with other aspiring artists. We become better artists by learning more geography, history, culture, and language. We become better artists as we allow God’s Spirit to open our minds and hearts to his word. We become better artists as we strive to live every day according to God’s teaching.

As aspiring artists (we will always be aspiring), we sometimes have a tendency to over-read Scripture – seeing things in a passage that just aren’t there. Usually, that is because we already know what we want to find. Just as often, however, we under-read Scripture, we fail to grasp the richness of a story or passage. Today’s Scripture passage is one that is often under-read; i.e., it is read as just another of Jesus’ healings. Yet, Luke presents a story that is filled with significance, so let’s take a look at a few things we might miss on a casual reading.

The woman

We don’t know much about the woman. For eighteen years she has been stooped, crippled by what Luke calls a “spirit of weakness” in the Greek. This would have been a matter of shame for the woman, as disabilities were seen by the community to be the result of sin. She has probably come to the synagogue to worship as it is the Sabbath, but she may have come for healing. Regardless, when Jesus spots her, he immediately pronounces her healed and lays hands on her, an act of blessing as well as healing. Not surprisingly, the woman stands upright immediately and praises God. What other response could there be?

What we might miss here is that, as Alan Culpepper notes in his commentary, the story of this woman is the story of many women. The woman’s illness has diminished her in a community that already diminished the role of all women. When Jesus pronounces the woman a “daughter of Abraham” whose healing is more important than the keeping of Sabbath law, he is restoring not only her health but also her dignity. In her healing, Jesus has proclaimed release to this captive (see Luke 4:16-19).

He has made her whole, in every sense of the word. Not only can she walk upright, her village will again accept her fully. Her healing is a multi-dimensioned blessing. She has been saved.

Sabbath

When Jesus is confronted by the leader of the synagogue about the Sabbath law, Jesus responds in the manner of a rabbi, arguing from the lesser to the greater. If it is alright to water an animal on the Sabbath, how can it be wrong to heal this woman? Culpepper writes, "The leader of the synagogue had cited the necessity of keeping the Sabbath, but Jesus counter posed the greater necessity of freeing a human being from whatever crippled, bound, and diminished her." Satan had "bound" the woman and Jesus had "loosed" her. Like the crowds, our response ought to be celebration of Jesus' dramatic enactment of the

coming of God's kingdom and God's victory over Satan – for that is exactly what is going on in this "mere" healing.

Hypocrisy

After Jesus restored the woman to wholeness, the synagogue leader in incensed that Jesus healed her on the Sabbath. Jesus, in turn, confronts the man and pronounces him a hypocrite, detailing exactly how.

Hypocrisy is pretending to be what one is not, especially when it comes to virtues and religion. It is a mis-match between what you say and what you do. That is the leader's sin.

Now, I'll grant that there are probably genuine hypocrites in church, but for many Christians striving to be a better disciple of Jesus, their mistakes are not hypocrisy but simply a failure to yet be the person we are striving to be. A high jumper who is trying to clear seven feet and failing isn't a hypocrite, just an athlete trying to get better.

Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that there are many who proclaim themselves Christian but are a terrible witness to Christ. Some are very public about it. Here, I'm thinking of men like Robert Tilton, Jim Bakker, and others. Some of these very public embarrassments are simply disciples caught up in the glittering vices. Others, I fear, are frauds. Blessedly, in the end, only God can know the state of anyone's heart.

And then there are well-meaning Christians who say the most stupid and hateful things that are anything but a testimony to the love of God and the Good News. As someone who says and writes thousands of public words each week, I am well aware of the dangers and am the first to ask for grace and the benefit of the doubt from time to time. Nonetheless, I wish some Christian leaders would guard their tongues a bit more carefully.

All of the apostle Paul's teachings about how

The Satan

Many Christians struggle with the Bible's depiction of Satan (or better, "the satan," *ha-satan* in the Hebrew) and demons in general. Are there really demons? And the corollary – are there really angels? Is the satan genuine, a personal being who actively opposes God and God's purposes. You might find the following from N.T. Wright to be helpful. This is from the glossary of his *For everyone* New Testament commentary series.

"The Bible is never very precise about the identity of the figure known as 'the satan.' The Hebrew words mean 'the accuser' [as in Job] and at times the satan seems to be a member of YHWH's heavenly council. . . . However, [the Hebrew word] becomes identified variously with the serpent of the Garden of Eden and with the rebellious daystar cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15) and was seen by many Jews as the quasi-personal source of evil standing behind both human wickedness and large-scale injustice, and sometimes operating through semi-independent 'demons.' By Jesus' time, various words were used to denote this figure, including Beelzebub and simply 'the evil one.' Jesus warned his followers against the deceits this figure could perpetrate. His opponents accused him of being in league with the satan, but the early Christians believed that Jesus in fact defeated [the satan] both in his own struggles with temptation (Matthew 4; Luke 4), his exorcisms of demons, and his death (1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 2:15). Final victory over this ultimate enemy is thus assured (Revelation 20), though the struggle can still be fierce for Christians (Ephesians 6:10-20)."

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Christians ought to behave boil down to this: (1) do what is a good witness to Christ and (2) do what builds up the body of Christ. Avoid what is a bad witness. Avoid what tears down the body of Christ. That's it. If only all of us would heed Paul's teachings, there would be many fewer obstacles thrown up in the paths of non-believers. A large of part growing in our discipleship is coming to see better the ways in which our words and actions fail to match up, i.e, the ways in which we indulge in hypocrisy.

Parables

Becoming a better reader of Scripture means paying attention to how the writer tells his story. Today's passage is a good example. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are also found in Matthew and Mark, but there they are in a collection of parables. Luke has a point to make by placing them immediately after the woman's healing. Notice that after the crowds rejoice, Luke writes that Jesus said "therefore" before telling the brief parables. The parables help us to understand the significance of this healing, for none of Jesus' healings are merely healings. They are all enactments of God's kingdom, occasions when the kingdom comes bursting out. The healing may seem like an inconsequential act for an

inconsequential woman, but it is out of such small moments that big consequences come. Small beginnings. Big results.

Look again at the parable of the yeast. The woman is actually trying to hide the leaven inside the dough. This would be a better translation than "mixed in." She might think she can hide the small amount of leaven (a small helping of heaven?) but what she ends up with is fifty pounds of leavened dough. It is fruitless to try to hide or ignore God's kingdom.

Whole healing

When Jesus heals, he heals the whole person. It isn't even right to say that he heals the body *and* the spirit. The Jews were not body/spirit or body/soul or body/mind dualists. Rather, the Jews understood that we are whole persons, integrated persons made in the image of God. Thus, when Jesus heals the woman, every bit of her is healed. She is freed from her illness. She is freed from Satan. And she is freed from the shame and marginalization that had been hers for eighteen years.

But there is yet more here. Jesus is able to free this woman from Satan's grip. Despite the synagogue leader's tight boundaries around Sabbath, the stooped woman rises to praise God. Is this not what Jesus wants for all Israel? That his people, all people, would hear and see the proclamation of the Good News despite all their tight boundaries and expectations about God, kingdom, and Messiah. Doesn't Jesus hope that Israel herself would be freed from the grip of Satan? . . . Yes, there is always more to these stories than meets the eye!

Satan - continued from page two

What we might call "spiritual beings," whether loyal to God or rebellious, are woven throughout the biblical narratives. So much so that the great 20th-century German theologian, Karl Barth, was led to say that "to deny the angels of God is to deny God." In the biblical view, reality is much larger than the world we see and touch each day. In one of his best books, Philip Yancey sees in this world, "rumors of another world." The things of this other world may be unseen but that does not make them unreal.

For much of my life, my theology had little room for Satan, demons, or anything of the sort. But as the years have rolled by, I've come to see that the existence of spiritual beings who work against God's purposes is as good an explanation of much of what is wrong with this world as any. And I've learned that the existence of such beings, loyal and rebellious, is certainly the biblical view of God's creation. So, yes I accept the existence of the Satan.

Still, I have to remind myself that the existence of Satan does not diminish my own responsibility for my actions. There is no room for "the devil made me do it." When Satan confronts Jesus in the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus but he can't make Jesus do anything. Likewise, *ha-satan* may tempt me away from God and God's ways, but I am responsible for choosing each day to love God and neighbor, to live so that the image of God within me shines brightly for all to see. And by the grace of God, the Spirit of God empowers and enables me to resist temptations - at least, much of the time!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by talking about what I've called the art of reading Scripture. What do you think I mean? Do agree that it is an art? Why? How important is it that we become better artists in our reading? How would we become better artists? What are three steps you could take in the coming months to become a better artist, a better reader, of Scripture?
2. Has anyone ever complained to you about the "hypocrites in the pews," in whom words and actions don't match? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
3. Does it seem to you that too many Christians give Christianity a bad name? What are some examples? How have you accounted for that? Have you ever been tempted to pronounce that someone isn't a Christian, despite what they say?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, 1 Corinthians 14:1-19 Paul tells these Christians that the gift of tongues speaking is to be used to build up the church	Tuesday, 1 Corinthians 14:20-25 Paul then tells these Christians that the gift of tongues speaking has to be restrained in public so people don't think they are crazy. What sort of witness to Christ would that be?
Wednesday, 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10 We are new creations in Christ and we have been given a ministry of reconciliation. We are to be "ambassadors of Christ." If only, more Christians remembered that 24/7!	Thursday, Galatians 5:13-26 The true meaning of Christian liberty; living in the Spirit
Friday, John 3 The full chapter on Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus.	Weekly Joys and Concerns

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We will begin Genesis on Sep 12

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the Gospel of Luke

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

NOTE: These two classes are on hiatus and should resume the week of September 11.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org