

## “Drinking With Your Donkey”

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (O.T. Reading):

<sup>4</sup> The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

<sup>5</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

<sup>6</sup> “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” <sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to me,  
“Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

<sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord  
reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.

<sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and  
overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Luke 13:10-17

With all of this talk about our environment and “going green” a preacher friend of mine decided to install sanitary hot air dryers in the rest rooms at his church, you know the kind I’m talking about? After two weeks he took them out. I asked him why and he confessed that they worked fine—they cut down on the cost of paper products and the trash output, but he went in a bathroom one day and found a sign that read: “For a sample of this week’s sermon push the button.” If you’ve come to worship today with wet hands you’ve come to the right place because I have some hot air in store for you!

Luke text: <sup>10</sup> On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, <sup>11</sup> and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” <sup>13</sup> Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. <sup>14</sup> Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” <sup>15</sup> The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? <sup>16</sup> Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” <sup>17</sup> When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Both of our scripture readings this morning involve a touch: one that empowers and one that restores. The first touch involves the words that God spoke to Jeremiah when He first called him to be a prophet. **“The word of the Lord came to me.”**

One Biblical scholar described the world situation in 640 B.C. with the decline of Assyria and the rise of new military and political forces. Then he imagined himself as God looking over the troubled world and thinking, “What can I do about all of this? And God answering, “I know, I’ll make Jeremiah.”

And God said to Jeremiah, **“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”** What an awesome statement. Awesome in its philosophical, theological and even moral implications. But also, in its implications for our daily lives, for God knew each of you before you were formed in your mother’s womb. How cool is that?

And God went on to say, **“Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”** From that word “nations” we can assume that God meant more than just the nation of Israel—that he would be appointed over many nations and many kingdoms.

Jeremiah responded much like we would and much like Moses before him when he was called from the burning bush—claiming not to be able to speak and also claiming to be **“only a child.”** To Moses God sent his brother Aaron to speak for him—for Jeremiah He touched his mouth and gave him the words he would need for his work.

Jeremiah is telling God that he can’t do what he’s being called to do, and God is telling him with His touch he can do anything. Is God calling you to do something you don’t think you’re equipped for? Remember, God doesn’t call the qualified—He qualifies those He calls.

You can’t outrun God! You can’t ask God any question that he won’t have an answer for! You can’t give God any excuses that He won’t have a come-back for! I know all of this for a fact because I ran—I had excuses—I didn’t think I could answer His call—I didn’t think I had the compassion or the ability to be a Pastor. Before I entered the ministry I couldn’t speak before a crowd of people—even people I knew, and He took care of that for me.

Saint Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers that includes this story that we have for our Gospel Lesson this morning. Luke, being a physician, was probably drawn to this story. Jesus is teaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath—something He regularly did. As the teacher He would have been sitting front and center—Rabbi’s sat as they taught. The other major character in the story is a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years and was sitting in the back, lucky she was even there in the first place.

We know very little about this woman. We don't know her name—don't know why she has come to the Synagogue. It's possible she was a regular member there—maybe just a drop-in—or maybe she was there because she had heard about Jesus and knew He was going to be there. We do know that she has suffered for eighteen years, or at least Luke seems to know. I could say that she was sitting in the back because she was a good Methodist and that was her pew but to tell you the truth, she was there because she was a woman that's where she would have been required to sit. Women in that culture weren't permitted to participate actively in the worship with the men which would have been taking place up front. And they weren't allowed to speak.

But Jesus spots her in the back and He is moved with compassion, which was often the case. So He calls her out—asks her to the front of the room. Every eye in the place must have been on her. Everyone must have been wondering what in the world Jesus was doing—why was He calling her to the front—who was she anyway. She was probably wondering the same thing.

And then, right there in the middle of all the men gathered for worship He touched her—not only did He touch her, but He set her free from her infirmity. How dare He do such a thing and on the Sabbath to boot!

In just a few seconds Jesus breaks at least six cultural rules:

- (1) Jesus speaks to the woman which would have been a no-no back then;
- (2) He calls her to the center of the room;
- (3) He touches her (O my God!);
- (4) He calls her "daughter of Abraham" (this would make her a full-fledged member of the nation of Israel—as a woman);
- (5) He heals on the Sabbath (which we'll get to); and
- (6) He challenges the ancient belief that her illness is a direct punishment from God for sin. He asserts that she is ill—not because God willed it—but because there is evil in the world. (In other words, bad things happen to good people). And if you weren't paying attention (checking emails, texting, or surfing the web) you could have missed the whole thing! (Some things happen so that we can witness God's glory)

Have you noticed that whenever you try to do something significant someone comes along to criticize? Busybodies—the world is full of them.

Enter the synagogue leader into our story, he complains—not to Jesus but to the woman: **“There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”** I like the examples that Jesus used to put this guy in his place: an ox and a donkey, kind of fitting don’t you think? Just like He will do for you or for me—Jesus comes to the defense of this woman and the others in the crowd. The synagogue ruler was spouting off about rules while **THE RULE** was standing right in front of him!

Greyhound bus lines used to have a rule, and maybe still do: No pets on their buses. And so, late one night at a rural truck stop in Florida a Greyhound driver kicked an 80-year-old woman off his bus. Her crime? She was returning home from her birthday party with her present: a tiny puppy named Cookie.

Dogs aren’t allowed on Greyhound buses and the driver refused to make an exception, leaving this poor elderly woman about 80 miles from home at 3:00 in the morning. Can’t you just hear the driver justifying his actions: “We have rules—we have rules.”

A security guard summoned by the bus driver called sheriff’s deputies to escort her away adding to this poor woman’s fright. “When the bus pulled away and I saw all those policemen I was scared,” she said. “I thought they were going to put me in jail. I don’t know, I was crazy with fear. I’ve never gone to jail.”

What could have become a terrifying ordeal for the woman—who walks with a crutch and has trouble hearing and seeing—instead became an inspiration. After getting her a sandwich and something to drink, police from five different jurisdictions teamed up to take her home.

Greyhound had a rule. The religious rulers of Jesus’ time had a rule too. Note what Jesus says: **“Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?”** (Thus the title to my sermon “Drinking With Your Donkey). Jesus wants the synagogue thugs to know that yes, rules and regulations may be important, but they aren’t the only thing that matters to God!

When Jesus saw the crippled woman sitting in the back of the synagogue His compassion kicked in. But His compassion was for more than just a physical cure. In His eyes bodily sickness—even though

not necessarily the result of transgression was always the sign of a deeper illness: the sickness of the soul. Thus, this healing by Jesus was a sign and promise of a deeper healing.

What Jesus said that day to the synagogue rulers humiliated them—some translations record that they were put to shame. I told you last week that in order for us to have the fire of Jesus in our souls there are a few things we need to do. One of those is to have our eyes trained to spot those in need—just as Jesus has done in our story this morning. The other thing is that the scope of our prayers and our compassion must extend beyond our own needs.

Jesus broke the rules! He healed a woman on the Sabbath. Jesus wants us to see that God's love for God's children is greater than God's adherence to rules and laws.

If we have Jesus in our heart, we too can have that compassion—we too can touch the lives of others to both empower and redeem. We may not be able to bring the physical healing that Jesus could bring but by telling others about Him we can bring healing into the lives of others.

Jesus reached out to touch this woman and she was healed—not eventually but the scripture says immediately—and then she praised God.

Jesus reached out and touched me—called me to the ministry—equipped me for my work—and took away my fear of speaking in public. (Friendship UMC sermon)

Some of you are hurting today. Some of you might be bent out of shape a little. Jesus is reaching out for you as well! Are you ready to be straightened up? If so, are you ready to praise God?

Thanks be to God!