

**“Showing Up”
Luke 13:10-17**

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¹⁰Now [Jesus] 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.

Just two sentences. Two simple sentences.

And 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.

I’ve shared before with you that I sometimes I wonder about the “supporting cast” of Scripture—this large group of people, some with actual speaking parts—folks who drift in and out of these Bible stories. In most cases, we’re not told what their names are. If the Bible were a movie, the closing credits would include a long list of characters known simply as, “rich young man,” “bleeding woman who touched Jesus,” “boy with five loaves and two fish.”

There are dozens of them in the gospels alone—these characters who help us understand the message and who, at times, can seem a bit one-dimensional. “The leper,” “the man with dropsy,” “the woman at the well”—they show up in the story, do their job, and go home. It’s left to us to wonder, “Who is this person, really? What is he like? Does she have a family? Dreams? Aspirations?”

And 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.

Now if you or I were playing the part of the woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years, we might wonder *exactly how* we got into the synagogue. The back door? The side entrance? Did we arrive early and wait all day, or did we squeeze through the crowd? The gospel story doesn’t really say *how* she got in. It says that she *appeared*—that she just *showed up*.

Back to verse 10: Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared, out of nowhere almost—no one knew quite where she came from, or how she got in—their eyes were, after all, fixed on Jesus—though to tell you the truth, people had stopped really *seeing* her ages ago—anyway, suddenly she just showed up, a woman with a spirit

that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

After eighteen years, she could hardly remember any other way of seeing the world. She had a vague notion of what it was like to walk down the road, upright with her gaze fixed on the horizon, or to stroll through the crowded markets making eye contact with strangers and friends, greeting loved ones from far away. For eighteen long years now, her window to the world was a view of her own feet, the road, dirty and gritty, weeds growing through the dusty cracks in the ground. Unable to make eye contact with others easily, she could see their shoes and their shadows, and so she strained to hear them speak, and especially in crowds, she took great pains to listen for a friendly voice among the din of greetings and conversations.

On this particular Sabbath, the voice she listened for was that of Jesus, the one everybody was talking about—the one who, they say, had cured the sick and restored sight to the blind. On this Sabbath day, she couldn't *see* him, but standing there, staring at her worn, tired feet, she could strain to hear his voice.

Of course, this wasn't the first time she'd gotten her hopes up. There'd been other traveling preachers—others who claimed to have God's healing touch in their fingers. And God knows, she'd tried them all, losing a little more hope each time, feeling her life falling more deeply into the clutches of whatever it was that had her so forcefully bent over. *The Bible doesn't say. We don't know what "spirit" had crippled this woman.*

It could have been a nagging deformity of the spine, or a series of defective vertebrae, or a horrendous twist of muscles and tissue.

Or it could have been that something happened to her. It could be that something unspeakable happened to her, as a child, or as an adult... some moment of trauma, violence... some mistreatment that left her unable to move on.

It could have been that moment long ago, or it could have been her day-to-day life, struggling to cope with hardship or abuse. She could have been living in an unsafe home, staying with an unsafe family, sleeping with an unsafe spouse... And her ability to stand up straight had been taken from her over time.

It could have been *shame* and the compound interest it created as she berated herself, day after day, for not being good enough, or strong enough, or smart enough.

It could have been an addiction of some kind. They did *have* addictions back then. It could have been anything from drugs to alcohol, to gambling, to food, to compulsive shopping and spending, to judging others, to gossiping. Pick your poison... but every time our behavior is altered to accommodate our addiction, we've been crippled by the spirit of that addiction.

It could have been fear.

It could have been crushing debt.

It could have been the challenge of parenting a child with special needs.

It could have been racism, sexism, or homophobia.
It could have been a loveless marriage.
It could have been loneliness...

Whatever it was, there was no denying its power to cripple her, to make it so she couldn't see straight *or walk with her head held high*. Once you're under the power of just such a spirit, there is no way out. It wraps you up and chokes out any hope that life could be different. And so your best defense is resignation and acceptance: "*This is just who I am now!*" And so you begin to identify yourself—in fact you begin to let others identify you based on that crippling spirit. "He's the fat one; she's a workaholic; he's a drunk; she's been abused, he's got a bad marriage, she's neurotic, he's self-centered..." Those labels bend us down low. They are hard to shed, and so they become the sources of our shame, and a life lived in shame is not easy to navigate. So we spend our days with our proverbial canes and crutches, slipping in late and making our way to the back corner of the room, hunched over because we can't stand to look anyone in the eye—can't stand to look ourselves in the eye anymore. For eighteen years, this is the bent-over woman. She is you. She is me. She is everyone who has ever lost a battle with oppression, low self-worth, or judgment. She is everyone who has ever struggled with illness, addiction, loss of value, loss of spouse, loss of self-esteem, loss of innocence... [1]

And yet she shows up. These two simple sentences: *And 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.* Two simple sentences that tell quite a story for this woman, staring at the floor, listening to Jesus but unable look him in the eye.

For us today they might lead to two simple questions. What is it that is crippling you these days? And are you letting it show up?

What's crippling you? What has you bent over double? What's weighing you down? What's dragging your soul under? What burden have you been carrying lately—and maybe not just lately, but for years and years? What's crippling you? It could be guilt. It could be cancer. It could be coming up a dollar short every single month. It could be depression. It could be a nagging fear that the rest of the world is judging you just as harshly as you judge yourself. What's bending you down low? What's crippling you and preventing you from being the kind of person God is calling you to be?

Think for a moment about what's crippling you and then ask yourself the second question: *Are you letting it show up?*

You and I, we're good at hiding most of life's crippling effects. We can mask our fears and addictions. We can arrive and enter the conversation with the best of them:

Hi. How ya doin'?

Fine. You?

Good.

And you wish it were true—that you were "good" *or even "fine."* But the stone cold truth is that you've got this crippling thing—this fear, this loneliness, this sense that if you start crying you'll

never stop. So this morning, *just for a moment*, stop asking yourself whether or not you're hiding it well, and ask yourself, "Am I letting it show up? *Am I showing up?*"

Woody Allen was the one who once said that "80% of life is showing up." You know, for the woman in the temple, the one who was crippled for eighteen years, for her it was *all about showing up*. If you'll notice, she didn't ask to be healed, and Jesus didn't ask her if she wanted to be made well. He just called her over and touched her. No questions, no faith statements, no promises to be good—*she just showed up*.

Friends, is there a place in your life where you can *really just show up*? Where the crippled part of you—the ugly side, the broken side, the painful wound, the torn expectations, the disappointments, the fear that things might not ever get better—is there a place where that part of you *can just show up*?

A woman that I knew years ago told me about an experience she had with her pastor. She was feeling restless and depressed and had come in for some counseling, and in that meeting with her pastor she decided to *show up*. "What more did I have to lose?" she said. "I told her *everything*—about the anger and the abuse, about feeling abandoned, about wanting it all to end *any way it could*. I told her *everything*. And in that moment, I wasn't healed all at once, but the healing began."

"How?" I asked.

"She looked at me. My pastor—*she looked at me*, and she wouldn't look away. I guess that's what I expected her to do—look away—you know, *avert her gaze*—from the hard, ugly side of me—but she kept looking, and in that moment I realized *that I was worth seeing*."

Is there a place in your life where you can truly be seen? Where you can really just show up? Where the crippled part of you shows and it's ok? Is there a place that welcomes not the Facebook profile version of you, not the varnished, *clean-the-front-room-and-put-on-a-happy-face-for-company* version of you, but the *real* you—the less-than-satisfied you—the hoping-it-gets-better you—the crippled you?

I would suggest to you this morning, friends, that Jesus may be waiting for you in that place—just waiting for you to *finally show up*. Could be in your marriage. Could be in the confines of a close friendship. Could be with a counselor or pastor. It could begin here, it could *be here now*, in this moment even, where you show up *just for yourself and for God*.

Is there a place for you to show up? And in that place, can you begin to listen for the voice of the living Christ—the One calling you forward and setting you free?

1. For this paragraph and for the suggestion that we might wonder about the *kind* of spirit that crippled the woman, I am grateful to the Rev. Linda Pepe and her sermon, "Heat Wave... Standing up Straight with the Bent Over Woman," preached at First Baptist Church in Moorestown, NJ.