

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2025: Sermon on Luke 13:10-17 by Revd Sarah Bagnall (Aspenden, Buntingford & Westmill)**

**The Gospel reading is taken from Luke**

**Chapter 13 beginning at verse 10.**

**Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**

**according to Luke. *Glory to you O Lord.***

<sup>10</sup>Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup>But 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.' <sup>15</sup>But 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? <sup>16</sup>And 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?' <sup>17</sup>When 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.

**This is the Gospel of the Lord**

***Praise to you Lord Christ***

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Luke 13:10–17 is a rich but also provocative passage—Jesus healing the bent-over woman on the Sabbath. And it invites us to reflect on healing, justice, and the courage to stand upright.

But firstly, I just want to say that I recognise this passage could be **TOTALLY misread** in ways that **unintentionally** stigmatize disability. The phrase “*a spirit that had crippled her*” is an unhelpful one & perhaps a legacy of medical understanding 2000 years ago. However, a **faithful reading**, especially one shaped by disability theology and lived experience, invites us to see this passage **not as a condemnation** of disability, **but as a celebration of dignity and divine attention**.

Think about being bent over for eighteen years. Not just physically, but socially, spiritually, emotionally. Your gaze is always fixed on the dust, your posture a metaphor for your place in the world—overlooked, burdened, diminished.

Luke introduces us to a woman like this. She doesn’t speak. She doesn’t ask for healing. She simply shows up in the synagogue. And Jesus sees her. This is a story **about being seen**.

If we look at what takes place: Jesus doesn’t ask her to repent. He doesn’t shame her. He doesn’t treat her as a theological object. Jesus calls her forward. He lays hands on her. And immediately, she stands up straight and begins to praise God.

**This is a story about restoration**—not about fixing what’s “wrong,” but about affirming what’s sacred. And it is not just a miracle—it’s a sign. **The Sabbath**, meant to be a day of rest and renewal, becomes the **stage for divine restoration**. Jesus reclaims the Sabbath from legalism and the Jewish rules that the pharisees are referring to and he returns the Sabbath to its original purpose: liberation.

The Sabbath—**not as a day of restriction**, but as a day **of restoration**. A day when people are reminded they belong. A day when the community is called to stand up straight alongside those who’ve been bent by exclusion.

And Jesus completely reframes the woman’s identity. She is not just a sufferer—she is a daughter of Abraham. A bearer of covenant. A person of dignity.

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The woman's posture may have changed, but her worth was never in question. Jesus doesn't heal her to make her acceptable. He heals her to reveal what was already true: she is a daughter of Abraham. A full member of the covenant community.

"Woman, you are set free." — Luke 13:12

She is set free from exclusion. From invisibility. From the assumption that her condition made her less than.

For many people living with disability, healing is not about being "cured." It's about being seen, welcomed, and valued. It's about a community that stops trying to fix and starts learning to embrace.

The challenge of this passage is that it invites us to ask ourselves:

- Do we see people living with disability as full participants in the life of faith?
- Do our liturgies, buildings, and leadership structures reflect that inclusion?
- Are we willing to be disrupted—like the synagogue leader was—for the sake of justice?

You may or may not be a fan of Strictly Come Dancing – but you have to give the show and the BBC credit for the barriers they have broken down for people who are blind, deaf or living with a physical disability that it is still possible to dance. Millions of people saw the world differently the night that the music stopped while Giovanni Pernice and Rose Ayling-Ellis danced and we learnt the sign language for thank you. Similarly visually impaired Chris McCausland and Dianne Buswell wowed fans too. Both couples won because fans got behind them and celebrated their difference.

The woman in Luke 13 is seen by Jesus—not as a problem to be solved, but as a person to be cherished. He calls her forward not to erase her story, but to honour it. And when she stands upright, it's not just her spine that's restored—it's her place in the community, her voice, her dignity.

In Christ, wholeness is not about perfection. It's about communion. It's about being drawn into the life of God, **just as we are**—with our bodies, our stories, our limitations, our strengths. Jesus doesn't wait for us to be "fixed" before loving us. He loves us into freedom.

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That freedom is not uniformity—it's belovedness. It's the kind of wholeness that says: you are already enough. You are already seen. You are already loved.

*Healing not as a prerequisite for belonging, but as a fruit of being known and loved.*

The woman in the synagogue stood up straight. But so did the community—at least those who rejoiced. They saw what the Sabbath was for. They saw what Jesus was doing. They saw her.

And in that moment, something holy unfolded—not just a healing, but a revelation.

***We are called as we are.***

*Not after we've changed, not once we've proven ourselves—just as we are, in all our complexity and beauty.*

***Loved as we are.***

*Not despite our difference, but through it. Not conditionally, but eternally.*

***Healed when we recognise that.***

*When we stop striving to earn love and begin to receive it. When we let grace do its quiet work.*

***Whole in the kingdom of heaven.*** *Not by the world's standards, but by God's. Not through perfection, but through communion.*

This is the rhythm of grace.

**Called** as we are.

**Loved** as we are.

**Healed** when we recognise that.

**Whole** in the kingdom of heaven.

Not a ladder to climb, but a truth to rest in.

Not a demand to change, but a divine embrace that transforms.

Let us be a church that stands upright—not by enforcing sameness, but by celebrating sacred difference and encouraging full participation for all in our church life and family.

Let us be a Sabbath people—where **rest means belonging**, and **healing means justice and equality; accessibility**.

Where wholeness is not conformity, but being one body in communion with Christ.

**Amen.**