

**The Anglican Cathedral
of St. John the Divine**

Newgate Street

St. John's, Antigua

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 16 (C)

August 25, 2019

DRAFT

“Impertinence towards Disease”

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 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. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 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.” 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? 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?” 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.

Dear Lord, by thy mighty hand heal us this day and make us whole again. Amen.

Eighteen years seems a long time. The bent over woman was bent over for eighteen years. Eighteen years before this event, Jesus, now thirty years old, Jesus was twelve. Do the math. At twelve, Jesus made his first foray into the Jerusalem temple—only the Gospel of Luke records this momentous occasion, only Luke records a discordant inconsistent Jesus who seems to betray his parents to slip away to the central synagogue of Jerusalem to teach the synagogue leaders for the first time, as a twelve year old boy. Jesus had begun his Heavenly Father's work.

I wonder where you were eighteen years ago. Were you at church? Were you even

born? But think back to the time you were twelve; where were you?

In 2001, eighteen year and seventeen days from today I was down near the World Trade Centers that had just fallen, killing thousands of people in less than two hours. The world watched in horror as one jet passenger plane after another had careened into those two great towers, reducing them to rubble before our eyes. I had unknowingly been sent by my New Jersey bishop who lived across the Hudson River to minister as a chaplain to those who were supposedly being transported into the waiting hospitals of New Jersey, but I lived in midtown Manhattan and the island of

Manhattan was closed to all incoming and outgoing traffic, by land or air. I and one other chaplain cared for almost all of those most injured victims; I wasn't prepared for that. But by the grace of God, all of our patients lived, about 450 of them, but about 450 had died saving them—mostly fire fighters, police and EMS workers. A few people that worked in Manhattan were able to get to New Jersey by ferry, but most of them were trapped in various places on the island of Manhattan. Fortunately my wife and I were not among the half million daily commuters from New Jersey who could not get off Manhattan Island. But by the grace of God,

the ones that the brave rescue workers had given their lives for had been saved. It was a strange equation, one life gave their life to save one life. But it in a way that reminds us of our Savior who died to save not one, but each of us. We each today are his one, the one he died to save. Jesus saw something in us worth saving. Jesus saw us as the lamb without its mother, the one sheep of the fold, the sheep that was lost. We are the one he had had in mind eternally to save from every trial we would ever face. Jesus gave each of us new life that day he hung on that cruel cross. He died to give each one of us life, life abundant, a life of freedom to worship him.

By his death Christ saved us, he saved you and he saved me from eternal damnation and suffering. And today, those of us who remember again what Our Lord did for each of us, we have gathered to worship him. We come to the foot of the cross as we come for Holy Communion, in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us. Jesus knew each of us personally as one for whom he was willing to give his life.

The 9-11 event has forever changed worldwide air travel—all of us now have to be screened and vetted every time we fly. Remember back again our freedom before 9-11. Now all of that has changed.

I had one experience during an annual ‘celebration memorial of 9-11’ in Manhattan where I live when a young woman had come to the base of the former tall towers that had by then been cleared out down to the bottom basements. People on that 9-11 memorial service and each annual 9-11 memorial service were allowed to come back to the towers to remember their loved ones who had died, and thousands did come there every year. By the incredible grace of God I was one of the chaplains who were on duty that 9-11 and every 9-11; my post around that twelve square block area during the memorial program was near the head of the one giant

ramp leading down to the bottom basements of the World Trade Towers—it was a three hundred foot long ramp that only walkers and a few EMS Gator trucks were permitted to use. One lone ambulance was down at the bottom by the Red Cross tent. And near the end of the rather drawn out memorial program where bereaved loved ones' names had been read over the loud speakers and on worldwide television, I saw a solitary woman sitting down there in a chair at the Red Cross tent; I could see several EMS workers were speaking to her one by one; but still she sat there, immovable, in that chair down deep in the pit where the two buildings had once stood.

Finally, when I was released from my chaplain post, and against all rules, I walked down that long ramp and made my way over to her. I learned that her fiancée and also her best friend both had died in the building collapse on 9-11. She was grieving their loss, yet again. And perhaps the gory thing most did not ever hear was that every time a person's partial remains were found, their next of kin were notified, and a funeral was held. However, that would sometimes mean multiple funerals, since remains were strewn around; bodies were almost never intact. It is a grim reminder of what happens after each major worldwide loss of lives, whether a

hurricane or a huge building collapse. One of my medical school professors spent fourteen years on the Island of Mauritius identifying the remains of the two hundred thousand victims who had died during a typhoon on that island.

The woman seated at the bottom of the ramp at the Red Cross tent was paralyzed by grief; she had been through the recovery of five sets of remains of her fiancé; and after the third funeral, she refused to have another funeral. But still she would have to be notified of the need to bury another set of remains. And on every 9-11, she would be reminded again of her great losses on that

fateful day. Finally we were able to pray with her, a rabbi chaplain friend of mine down there recited the Jewish prayer for the dead with her, in Hebrew, and she suddenly came back to life right there in front of my eyes. And I carefully led her up to the top of the ramp. She had finally been healed of her terrible grief. She was no longer paralyzed of her great grief. She had miraculously been healed that very day.

In our gospel lesson today about that momentous occasion in the synagogue on the Sabbath day of worship where Jesus had been teaching, a woman bent over and paralyzed from the hip up had been in the congregation.

Jesus saw her, and Jesus healed her. And he defended her healing from the ire of the jealous religious authorities who had apparently never before been able to heal her. Their work had been a sham. What they preached they did not live; and the people knew that, but still the people came to that holy synagogue week after week seeking healing from illness and grief and sin.

And this fortunate paralyzed woman was miraculously healed by Jesus' caring touch.

Perhaps today you have come here to ask God yet again for an answer to what before has seemed to be an unanswerable prayer. I am here today to announce to you that Jesus

has indeed heard your prayer, and that your healing is here and your healing is now. What burden you have been bearing, Jesus has taken on himself, and Jesus has lifted it from you. Now you can stand up straight again. Your burden was a burden that only Jesus could bear; it is a burden Jesus actually began lifting from you two thousand years ago, as he died for the sins of a world that sometimes does not want to be forgiven. Jesus died even when you didn't want him to die, for you, for me, for us here today. Jesus sees our burdens we have brought to him today. And Jesus assures us that he hears our every prayer and is removing that burden from our backs this very

day right here. Jesus has healed us. And this day we can rise up, stand up straight, and give God the glory that Christ this day had picked up that burden that we were carrying in today. By Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we are now saved and healed.

Let us give God all the glory. Amen.

Description: Jesus came to save us and to heal us now, individually, and as worshipers of him and his Heavenly Father. Jesus died on a cross to remind us of his gift of new life for us.

Tags: Jesus, Christ, God, heavenly, healing, eighteen, years, synagogue, Jerusalem, family, paralyzed, lifted, cross, two, thousand, years, 9-11, World Trade, towers, chaplain, burden, lifted, healed, twelve

[and below are excerpts from other sermons on this gospel text:]

A Sunday School teacher put a hypothetical question to her class one time. “Do you think a leopard can change his spots?” All the students in the class said, “No,” except for one little girl. Asked to explain, she said, “If a leopard doesn't like the spot he's in, I don't see why he can't change it.”

Are you in a spot? Is there something which is weighing you down? Are you carrying a weight that is too heavy for you?

Jesus came to lift our loads, guide our feet
into freedom, and put us on a track of life that
is worth living.

We can change our spot, with God' help.

English Poet Adelaide Anne Procter wrote:

(1825-1864)

Have we not all amid life's petty strife

Some pure ideal of a nobler life?

It once seemed possible. Did we not hear

The flutter of its wings and feel it near

And just within our reach? It was, and yet,

We lost it in this daily jar and fret.

But still our place is kept and it will wait,

Ready for us to fill it soon or late.

No star is ever lost, once we have seen

We always may be what we might have been.

Since Good, though only thought, has life and
breath,

God's life--can always be redeemed from
death;

And evil, in its nature, is decay,

And any hour can blot it all away;

The hopes that lost in some far distance seem,

May be the truer life, and this the dream.”

Like that bent woman, Jesus sees us and longs to touch us and heal us and make us who God created us to be.

After studying this miracle for some time, I came to the realization, that if this miracle is only for a small fraction of a percentage of people who have scoliosis, then it is more or less a powerless miracle for more than 99 percent of us who do not have scoliosis.

The history of the interpretation of this miracle seems always to want to point to a back problem for a woman. But I believe it is a head and heart problem for all of us.

How many of us think we are pretty OK and just want to get a little bit better? I think

this is the mirage of our times. If relative to the most holy God, the all-consuming fire we hear about in the reading from Hebrews, then we are no more than a few specks of dust ready to be consumed by God's unquenchable fire.

I read about the discovery of new planets circling far off suns and wonder if God is getting ready for another earth, another creation, another race of intelligent beings, since we are destined for the trash heap. God can do that, and for all I know, God is already doing that. <>But the very same God who is making new suns and new planets every

single day, day in and day out, is also responsible for making each of us.

Let us look back to determine what is bowing us over? Is it our debt?

We are bowed over, very bowed over. And we are not looking to Jesus as our rescuer. We are looking everywhere else than to the only one who can heal our country. The fastest growing religious segment in our society is the 'nones', and that is not just those who believe but do not come to church or synagogue, 'nones' are those who believe in nothing higher than themselves. They must have the latest in sports car or luxury car. They must have the latest in kitchen

appliances and washers and dryers. They must have the largest home on the block or on any block. And they have even infected Christians with this virally disastrous way of life, haven't they? The few who are really able to stay on an economically sparse budget is diminishing each and every day. We need this. We want this. We just have to have that. Spend, spend, spend, and off to work we go, but we cannot seem to get ahead. And we too are the ones with the crippled spirits, even on the Sabbath. And we are the ones who desperately need Jesus to notice us.

That Jesus even noticed the woman is called the grace of God. That she even had a

chance is because of the unending, unquenchable love of God. That her miserable life was about to take an upturn, was only by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit. And that is just as true now, as it was then. The insoluble wars of terrorism have bent us over. The seemingly insoluble spending spree we have been on has us bent over. And only by the good grace of God will we be able to take on another year, another decade, another life.

Let us pray for God's deliverance today and always. Amen.

[Here is another possible ending:]

This woman was bent over. In modern times, I think we can just as easily translate the Greek as saying she was “hung over”. That gives the miracle a more broad perspective. We all know about addictions. We all probably have come into contact with addictions. And maybe addiction could even be a part of our lives.

But Jesus’ healing can be for us. Jesus can heal hung over persons. Jesus can heal addictions.

I am on the leadership board of the American Lung Association of New Jersey.

We had a board meeting recently at a big cancer treatment facility and were hosted by a staff psychologist at the facility that has the job of helping people with lung cancer stop smoking. It is a very difficult job. He said most smokers have tried to quit smoking twenty to thirty times on average before they were able to quit lighting up.

I suspect that most addictions take multiple times to overcome. We have Jesus to help us, however, not just a staff psychologist at a major cancer center, not that a psychologist may not be part of Jesus' plan for ending some of our addictions.

But is the miracle only about people with scoliosis and addictions? I think not. All miracles are generally applicable to all of us or they are not applicable to any of us, is my premise.

So what else did Jesus do?

Obviously, Jesus flew in the face of the temple authorities who put rules in place of God. And they killed him for that. But he rose from the grave to show them.

My mother was paid a nickel each Sunday when she was a little girl to come to an orthodox Jew's home and light her stove each Sabbath. These rules still bind many religious

people today. How can we help them become unbound, with God's help?

Anything we do because we did it yesterday and the day before and the day before that, can come into the realm of addiction. If we repeatedly ignore hungry people, that is a type of an addiction. If we regularly ignore poor people, that is a type of addiction. If we ignore those who are addiction, that in itself is our addiction. So let us examine our own addictions. Are we addicted to middle class life, when so many in the world are starving and going without and are oppressed by cruel regimes? Cannot that also be an addiction that affects many of us?

Jesus comes into our synagogue, into our own homes, into our own hearts and tries to find where he can relieve each of us from the bindings we have taken on. Christ wants to relieve us of our ‘bent-over-ness’, our ‘bent-out-of-shape-ness’, our inability to see the suffering in the world where we can make a difference.

Relieve us of our blindness, Lord, and may we be healed by the incoming of your precious Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts and reset our thoughts and retune our spirits to in harmony with you. Amen.

[and here is yet a third alternate ending to the sermon:]

Dallas Willard in his book “The Divine Conspiracy” warns that in some churches the Christian faith has been reduced to what he calls “sin management,” concerned, he says, “only with how to deal with sin, with wrongdoing or wrong being and its effects.” But that was not the focus of Jesus' attention and action, and this episode in the synagogue is a good illustration of that.

Jesus was not into sin management, nor did he call his disciples to be. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find any place in the gospels

where Jesus called anyone a sinner. He called people foolish plenty of times. When Jesus criticized people for foolish or sinful behavior, it was in much the same way that a physician might evaluate a cancer patient. He wouldn't say, "You're a bad person." He would say, "You're a good person with a bad disease, and you need treatment." Jesus never lost sight of the essential, created goodness in everyone, but he was aware of how that essential goodness easily becomes contaminated by the selfish defiance of God's will. People in that state of "ill health" needed treatment. They needed transformation.

[http://day1.org/608-
beyond_change_to_transformation](http://day1.org/608-beyond_change_to_transformation)

Transformation comes at a cost, however. For us to be truly transformed, some energy needs to be expended to move us off our current course and put us onto our desired path. We have what is called, inertia, the tendency of a body to keep moving in the same direction. And inertia will keep us moving in the same direction unless some force intervenes to move us onto a different plane, onto a different course, hopefully in a healthier and more beneficial direction.

Most of us do not live up to our full potential, I am sorry to say. Athletes are continually trying to compete first with others, and when they have succeeded, they then begin to compete with themselves. Perhaps you saw the Olympic gold medalist Katie Ledecky in 2016 as she made history as just the second woman ever to win three individual freestyle events at a single Olympic Games in 2016 when she successfully defended her 2012 gold in the 800 meter freestyle swimming. She raced to eight minutes, 4.79 seconds to lower the world record for the fifth time. And she was the youngest female swimmer on the US Olympic team.

<http://www.nbcolympics.com/news/katie-ledecky-defends-800m-free-title-win-4th-gold-medal-rio-olympics>

How did Katie Ledecky do that? She practiced using her best time as being the one she wanted to beat. And she swam over and over again to race with herself, not looking at what others were doing but at whether she was ‘hitting’ her intermediate marks to keep up her pace on the long swim.

We need to set goals as Christians. But we also need to set intermediate targets to be able to determine if we are indeed going to finish first and best. Each intermediate target needs

to be carefully measured out, knowing that at the end steps of most any great goal we will be getting tired as we begin the last half of our race, the last half of our journey, the last half of what we have set out to do. So we need to be sure we are not just mathematically setting goals at exactly one-quarter, one-half, and three-quarters of the final goal. The first half we can usually run say maybe twenty percent faster, and when we allow for that, the latter half can still be accomplished even though we may be running only eighty percent of our average. It's human nature to exaggerate our abilities, and not to compensate for drop off as we come to the last half of our goals.

But once our inertia in the new direction kicks in, and we can keep on keeping on in our journey toward our goals.

The woman Jesus saw in the synagogue was bent; what ‘bent’ means has been often diagnosed as some sort of scoliosis, just a medical condition of her spine. But the use of the words in the gospel story seem to point to another problem entirely. She has a crippling spirit, not necessarily a crippled spine, if you read the text carefully.

And surprisingly enough, early English translates ‘bent’ as being inebriated, recall the common phrase, “hung over”, and had nothing to do with one’s spine at all.

Something can hold us into a bind that is too strong for us to throw it off easily. It can be an addiction; it can be a debilitating relationship; it can simply be trying to cope with a difficult decision when we don't have the tools or wherewithal to accomplish it. So we are bent.

This makes it extremely hard to meet any goals we set for ourselves or for our church or community group. And when something has 'gotten us down', we need help straightening up again.

If addictions are the problem, then often we need to find a support group who can help nurture us to health. AA and NA, and a

variety of Anonymous groups can be and are lifesavers.

If in the case of this woman whose ‘spirit had crippled her’, it may be an emotional grieving or sadness or depression that has gotten us down. Then we need help in lifting this enormous weight. Sometimes a pastor or a psychologist or medical person may be the answer or part of the answer. When we need help, we need to ask for help. And begin with prayer asking God for guidance. God does hear our prayers. And many times a miraculous answer may come our way, just as it did for the woman in our gospel story today. Sometimes it may come in steps, not all at

once; but we need to pursue all avenues to find help.

Surely this woman in today's gospel had gone many places seeking help. But today she came to the right person, to Jesus Christ, to find complete healing. And she was able to stand up straight and shout, Halleluiah, and praise God. Note she did not fall down at Jesus' feet and praise him, as occasionally other healed people did; she innately knew the healing had come from God through the hands of Jesus, so she gave God all the glory.

Part of securing our healing comes from being ready to praise God when our healing has come. Don't just go on about our merry

way just thinking some drug or some professor or some doctor got us healed. No, all healing comes from God. Maybe a medicine or medical treatment or advice aided the process, but ultimately, only God can truly heal us. So we need to give God the credit.

Jesus does not wait to be asked, you will notice in today's gospel lesson. He has compassion on the bent woman. He could read her spirit which was trying to escape the clutches of satan on her life. And he called her over.

Maybe Jesus is calling you over today, this week. Jesus sees your needs, perhaps quiet needs, not loud needs, but Jesus hears your

inner child crying out for healing. And Jesus springs to action. We have come close to the Spirit of Christ here today. May you too find Jesus has laid out a new straight course for your life. And stand up and give God all the glory. God does hear our heartfelt prayers.

Amen.