



Sermon for Sunday, August 26, 2007, 11:15 a.m.

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Rev. Brenda G. Husson

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Luke 13:10-17

In these last couple of days, when the temperature has again been inching its way up towards and past ninety degrees, I was reminded of those people (who I confess always irritated me) who in the midst of some heat wave would say, "Well, just think cool!" It never actually helped. I preferred air conditioning or iced tea or something other than simply thinking cool thoughts. But I mention that because I am about to tell a story that you may find irritating, given this particular weather. The fact is, as I thought about this gospel what came to mind was a long-standing tradition here at St. James' that has to do with the service on Christmas day. It's a tradition that goes back well before the time I was rector here, and it is that any member of the clergy who has young children, children who wait with eager expectation for the arrival of Santa Claus, are exempted from the Christmas day service. The reason for that may be obvious, but let me explain. When I grew up, the rule in my house was that you could not open the Christmas presents until everybody was awake. You could get your stocking and go through that, but that was it. In some households, the rule is that you have to wait until everyone is awake and has had breakfast. Well I at least do not have the strength as a parent, and don't know many who do, to say, 'Everyone has to be awake. We all have to have breakfast. We all have to brush our teeth. We all have to go to church for an hour or so. And then we'll come home and see what Santa Claus has for us.' And so it is that the clergy with young children stay home on Christmas day, as I have for the last few years. But when my son was quite young, up until the age of about four, I did actually take part in the service on Christmas day. I got away with that because, though all the presents had arrived, my husband and I without blinking would look him in the eye on December 26th and say, "Merry Christmas!" He didn't actually track dates at that particular point, and frankly, we needed a little extra time and a little more sleep.

Those days are gone. But in those days we were able to say, I think perfectly legitimately, "What's another day?" The fact is, another day doesn't matter. Until it does. That's one of the points, one of the bits of truth embedded in this morning's gospel. The fact of the matter is that if

you have been ill for a long time, or if you have been in a broken relationship for a long time, or if you have been living on the edge or in the midst of poverty for a long time, one day isn't much different from another. That was certainly the experience of the woman with the spirit of the infirmity that had kept her crippled for eighteen years. Eventually, painful though it may be, one does grow used to being bent almost double. One does grow used to finding simple tasks extraordinary difficult. One does even grow used to hearing people whisper on the street as they pass by, 'Thank God I don't have what she has.' And in that situation, what difference does another day make? That's the point the leaders of the synagogue are trying to make when they go after Jesus. There are six other days of the week. You do not have to do this on the sabbath. But I tell you, and I'm sure you know, that if you have lived with illness and healing is in sight, if you have lived in a broken relationship and reconciliation is suddenly possible, if you live your life on the edge or in the midst of poverty and there is a job that is about to transform all that, every day, every *moment* matters, and it is cruel to suggest that someone wait, cruel to suggest that another day makes no difference.

Part of what we need to take away from this gospel is God's incredible sense of urgency; God's desire not that we be healed or restored, reconciled, freed, or raised up sometime, but God's desire and longing that that happen now. That the kingdom come. That restoration and reconciliation and new life begin. And we need that reminder, because we are people who do grow accustomed to the way things are. We do grow accustomed. Consider our language. If you want, you can start with Shakespeare, who wrote in *The Tempest*, "The past is prologue." Or hear yourself, as you pull something out of your closet you thought you'd never wear again, say "Everything old is new again." Or find yourself saying sometimes, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." We have a vocabulary that is rich in phrases to tell us that nothing is going to be different and, too much of the time, that therefore nothing is going to be better.

But this passage says to us that God never looks at this world and never looks at us with a shrug of the shoulders and a sense that, "Oh well, it's always been that way." God looks at us and enters into our world through Jesus Christ, and now through the Holy Spirit, eager to see it change, eager to see it different. We need to know that. I think more and more as a parish we do know that when we look at the life of the world. More and more, we are people who are committed to justice and mercy, to compassion and peacemaking.

But the other little piece of this story that is so important is the piece that talks not about the world outside these doors, but the world in which we live in our hearts and our minds and our spirits. Because the painful truth is that in this story, unlike some other healing stories, this woman with the spirit of infirmity doesn't come looking for healing. She isn't one of those who reaches out to Jesus, asking for his touch or his word. She is just a woman who comes on this sabbath as she's probably come on countless others, bent over and in pain, expecting little more than to hear a word of God that doesn't apply to her. I know that all of us, all of us, have places in our own lives, in our own hearts, that we have sealed off, set aside, having decided that they are beyond God's care or God's concern. And so

we come and we hear the word of God, and maybe it touches some part of our life, but we never even expect it to go to that closed off corner. This gospel comes to tell us it is just those dark corners for which God comes. We have begun to acknowledge that truth and speak of it. We have begun to acknowledge that truth by having healing prayer after three of our four Sunday services, healing prayer where people are invited to come forward for prayers for themselves or for someone else without any restrictions on what's an appropriate subject or not. If you are someone who has never thought to open that door into the closed part of your life, I hope you'll hear this gospel for what it is: not another round of Jesus feuding with the leadership, not just another miracle story, but as an invitation to all of us and whatever part of our lives we have decided is of no concern to God. If we open that door, whether today or tomorrow or sometime down the road, I am sure we will know the presence of God in some new way. I am even more sure that when we do that and let God in, we will know a joy that will make the delight of a child at Christmas pale in comparison.

Amen.