

Come Holy Spirit and awaken us! Amen.

*You can't imagine what it's like to live bent over, unable to straighten up.
Unable to look someone in the eye, to glance at the sky, to sit at a meal.
Not to be able to see people's looks, but know they are judging you –
You must have sinned to be so afflicted; you must have an evil spirit.
But still I went to worship on the Sabbath – I can't fully participate, but I can
listen to the scriptures, the stories about God's faithfulness to his people.
And I can pray. But I never prayed for healing; didn't think it was possible.*

*This day there was a guest there, and after the scroll was read, he taught.
I've never heard teaching like that, with such authority.
I just looked at the ground as I always do, and listened. And then I heard him call me –
“You, woman, you're not able to stand up straight, are you?”
My face went red – I wished the floor would open up. But he said, “Come here.”
So I shuffled in the direction of his voice.
I knew immediately when I was near him; I could feel the energy around him.
He put his hand on my back and said, “Women, you are set free.”
I felt that energy flowing into me, into my back, into my legs, and without a second
thought I stood up. Straight. Without any trouble! Without any pain!
I threw my arms up in the air and did a little dance, “Praise you God! Praise you God!”*

*People were so startled and shocked, but they began praising God too.
We had seen a miracle in our midst.
But one voice was not praising – the leader of the synagogue. He was mad.
“You can work six days of the week;
come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.”
As though the Sabbath were not the perfect day for healing;
as though the Sabbath were not a day to be made whole.
As though the Sabbath were not the day to know God's love in your life.
I just kept praising God; I couldn't stop.*

It's easy to judge that religious leader,
falling back on his rules in the face of God's power.
We are often more comfortable with rules than we are experiencing God's power.
God's power cannot be contained or controlled by us, and so it makes us nervous.

So nervous, we often neglect to invite that power to work in us for healing. But every day is a day for healing, and none more so than our Sabbath, Sunday. This service of holy eucharist we celebrate is at its heart a healing service. Jim Glennon, an Australian Anglican priest with a powerful healing ministry, tells the story of a woman who came to see him. People came to see him all the time, seeking healing, but this woman just talked about having been healed. Finally he interrupted and said, "I'm so glad, but if you've already experienced healing, why did you come to see me?" She wanted to tell him how she'd received healing. She said that after her diagnosis of cancer, every time she came to the communion rail she remembered the verse, "By his wounds, we are healed." She knew that the bread and wine we receive are signs the broken body and shed blood of Christ. So as she received, she'd affirm, "By his wounds, I am healed." And she was.

Why is this a healing service? Because at this table we encounter Jesus. In the Word read and proclaimed, we encounter Jesus. In our prayers, he is here. And at the table, he is here. In the bread and wine, he is here. And Jesus heals. Like that day in the synagogue, he doesn't wonder if it's "God's will" – he knows illness and disability are not God's intention for us. The very nature of God is wholeness, so healing will break out whenever and wherever God is ... and in that synagogue that day, God was there, in Christ, just as God is here today through Christ's body, the church gathered, as God is with us in Word and Sacrament, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What conditions and limitations do you just live with because you don't think anything can be done (which is like saying that thing is more powerful than God...)? A physical pain or disorder? A long-term depression, or tendency to anger easily? An addiction or inability to lose weight or be as fit as you'd like? Even lack of faith can feel like something we're stuck with. If the Good News about tells us anything, it is that we don't have to be stuck with anything, from personal failings or disease, to injustice and systemic corruption.

Steve Blamer, who is serving as our crucifer and acolyte this morning, fell 16 feet off a ladder three years ago. A catastrophic brain injury put him in the hospital for six months. They didn't know if he'd survive, let alone ever walk again. I prayed for his healing at several hospitals, and we've prayed for him weekly. Once he got home, he had seizures and set-backs... but he is a man of strong faith.

He couldn't come to church, but he came to Night Prayers on Zoom. He wanted the sacrament of communion, so Danielle and Karen began bringing it to him and Kathy weekly. He put himself in the way of healing – and look what God has done. It's a miracle. It was gradual, but miraculous.

We have been given tremendous power through our access to God in the Spirit. So when we encounter someone who is afflicted in body, mind or spirit, or we run smack up against injustice yet again, we don't have to think, "Oh, this isn't the time or place for prayer," or "I'm not the right person." It's not about our power. We don't have to be the right person – we know the right person. And he'll show up anytime we invoke his name. Come, Lord Jesus. That is the ancient prayer of the People of the Way, "Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus."

What do you think you're stuck with that God can release you from? In prayer, we can invite the power and love that made the universe to be released in us, in our bodies, our minds, our spirits. We can pray that the power and love that made the universe be released in our country, in our elected officials, in our neighborhoods. And expect that the living water of God is flowing and bringing new life to you wherever you need it most. And it doesn't stop there – it'll flow through you to every place and person who needs it.

Listen again to this promise: *The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

What a mission we have! To repair the breach, restore the streets. The more we pray, the more God's life breaks out and restores the world. Every day. The power and love of God cannot be contained or constrained. God is with us seven days a week, 24 hours a day, at all times and in all places.

Every day is a good day for healing.
Every day is a good day to stand for justice.
Every day is a good day to set the captives free.
Especially the Sabbath. Especially today. So let's pray! *Amen.*

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.

Isaiah 58:9b-14

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.
If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.