

## *More Than Meets the Eye*

5<sup>th</sup> Weekend of Kingdomtide – July 8/9, 2006  
Sermon Background Study

Luke 13:10-21 (NRSV)

<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.

<sup>18</sup>He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? <sup>19</sup>It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

<sup>20</sup>And again he said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? <sup>21</sup>It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

*Sometimes, we are under-readers of the Bible. There is much more to this story than a “mere” healing.*

Reading Scripture is an art. We become better artists through practice and by reading in community with other aspiring artists. We become better artists by learning more geography, history, culture, and language. We become better artists as we allow God’s Spirit to open our minds and hearts to his word.

As aspiring artists (we will always be aspiring), we sometimes have a tendency to over-read Scripture – seeing things in a passage that just aren’t there. Usually, that is because we already know what we want to find. Just as often, however, we under-read Scripture, we fail to grasp the richness of a story or passage. Today’s Scripture passage is one that is often under-read; i.e., it is read as just another of Jesus’ healings. Yet, Luke presents a story that is filled with significance, so let’s take a look at a few things we might miss on a casual reading.

*The woman*

We don’t know much about the woman. For eighteen years she has been stooped, crippled by what Luke calls a “spirit of weakness” in the Greek. This would have been a matter of shame for the woman, as disabilities were seen by the community to be the result of sin. She has probably come to the synagogue to worship as it is the Sabbath, but she may have come for healing. Regardless, when Jesus spots her, he immediately pronounces her healed and lays hands on her, an act of blessing as well as healing. Not surprisingly, the woman stands upright immediately and praises God. What other response could there be?

### The Satan

Many Christians struggle with the Bible’s depiction of Satan (or better, “the satan,” *ha-satan* in the Hebrew) and demons in general. Are there really demons? And the corollary – are there really angels? Is the satan genuine, a personal being who actively opposes God and God’s purposes. You might find the following from N.T. Wright to be helpful. This is from the glossary of his *For everyone* New Testament commentary series.

“The Bible is never very precise about the identity of the figure known as ‘the satan.’ The Hebrew words mean ‘the accuser’ [as in Job] and at times the satan seems to be a member of YHWH’s heavenly council. . . . However, [the Hebrew word] becomes identified variously with the serpent of the Garden of Eden and with the rebellious daystar cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15) and was seen by many Jews as the quasi-personal source of evil standing behind both human wickedness and large-scale injustice, and sometimes operating through semi-independent ‘demons.’ By Jesus’ time, various words were used to denote this figure, including Beelzebub and simply ‘the evil one.’ Jesus warned his followers against the deceits this figure could perpetrate. His opponents accused him of being in league with the satan, but the early Christians believed that Jesus in fact defeated [the satan] both in his own struggles with temptation (Matthew 4; Luke 4), his exorcisms of demons, and his death (1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 2:15). Final victory over this ultimate enemy is thus assured (Revelation 20), though the struggle can still be fierce for Christians (Ephesians 6:10-20).”

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What we might miss here is that, as Alan Culpepper notes in his commentary, the story of this woman is the story of many women. The woman's illness has diminished her in a community that already diminished the role of all women. When Jesus pronounces the woman a "daughter of Abraham" whose healing is more important than the keeping of Sabbath law, he is restoring not only her health but her dignity. In her healing, Jesus has proclaimed release to this captive (see Luke 4:16-19).

### *Sabbath*

When Jesus is confronted by the leader of the synagogue about the Sabbath law, Jesus responds in the manner of a rabbi, arguing from the lesser to the greater. If it is alright to water an animal on the Sabbath, how can it be wrong to heal this woman? Culpepper writes, "The leader of the synagogue had cited the necessity of keeping the Sabbath, but Jesus counterposed the greater necessity of freeing a human being from whatever crippled, bound, and diminished her." Satan had "bound" the woman and Jesus had "loosed" her. Like the crowds, our response ought to be celebration of Jesus' dramatic enactment of the coming of God's kingdom and God's victory over Satan - for that is exactly what is going on in this "mere" healing.

### *Parables*

Becoming a better reader of Scripture means paying attention to how the writer tells his story. Today's passage is a good example. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are also found in Matthew and Mark, but there they are in a collection of parables. Luke has a point to make by placing them immediately after the woman's healing. Notice that after the crowds rejoice, Luke writes that Jesus said "therefore" before telling the brief parables. The parables help us to understand the significance of this healing, for none of Jesus' healings are merely healings. They are all enactments of God's kingdom, occasions when the kingdom comes bursting out. The healing may seem like an inconsequential act for

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an inconsequential woman, but it is out of such small moments that big consequences come. Small beginnings. Big results.

What we might call "spiritual beings," whether loyal to God or rebellious, are woven throughout the biblical narratives. So much so that the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century German theologian, Karl Barth, was led to say that "to deny the angels of God is to deny God." In the biblical view, reality is much larger than the world we see and touch each day. In one of his best books, Philip Yancey sees in this world, "rumors of another world." The things of this other world may be unseen but that does not make them unreal.

Look again at the parable of the yeast. The woman is actually trying to hide the leaven inside the dough. This would be a better translation than "mixed in." She might think she can hide the small amount of leaven (a small helping of heaven?) but what she ends up with is fifty pounds of leavened dough. It is fruitless to try to hide or ignore God's kingdom.

For much of my life, my theology had little room for Satan, demons, or anything of the sort. But as the years have rolled by, I've come to see that the existence of spiritual beings who work against God's purposes is as good an explanation of much of what is wrong with this world as any. And I've learned that the existence of such beings, loyal and rebellious, is certainly the biblical view of God's creation. So, yes I accept the existence of the satan.

Whole healing

When Jesus heals, he heals the whole person. It isn't even right to say that he heals the body *and* the spirit. The Jews were not body/spirit or body/soul or body/mind dualists. Rather, the Jews understood that we are whole persons, integrated persons made in the image of God. Thus, when Jesus heals the woman, every bit of her is healed. She is freed from her illness. She is freed from Satan. And she is freed from the shame and marginalization that had been hers for eighteen years.

But there is yet more here. Jesus is able to free this woman from Satan's grip. Despite the synagogue leader's tight boundaries around Sabbath, the stooped woman rises to praise God. Is this not what Jesus wants for all Israel? That his people, all people, would hear and see the proclamation of the Good News despite all their tight boundaries and expectations about God, kingdom, and Messiah. Doesn't Jesus hope that Israel herself would be freed from the grip of Satan? . . . Yes, there is always more to these stories than meets the eye!

Still, I have to remind myself that the existence of Satan does not diminish my own responsibility for my actions. There is no room for "the devil made me do it." When Satan confronts Jesus in the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus but he can't make Jesus do anything. Likewise, *ha-satan* may tempt me away from God and God's ways, but I am responsible for choosing each day to love God and neighbor, to live so that the image of God within me shines brightly for all to see. And by the grace of God, the Spirit of God empowers and enables me to resist temptations - at least, much of the time!

## *Thru the Bible* Daily Bible Readings

July 9 - July 15

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Day 1</b> Amos 7-9; Ecclesiastes 8 Things may all look wonderful, like a basket of summer fruit, but the selfishness of the people points to Israel's destruction.</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b> 1 Chronicles 1-4; Ecclesiastes 9 The mother of all genealogies begins; Don't forget that Ecclesiastes is largely a picture of a life lived <u>without</u> God</p>
<p><b>Day 3</b> 1 Chronicles 5-8; Ecclesiastes 10 The genealogies and family histories continue; What could be the point of all this?</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b> 1 Chronicles 9-11; Ecclesiastes 11 We come to the story of David, though it will be told without much of David's personal story</p>
<p><b>Day 5</b> 1 Chronicles 12-14; Ecclesiastes 12 David establishes the capital in the conquered city of Jerusalem.</p>	<p><b>Day 6</b> A day for reflection and catching up</p>
<p><b>Day 7</b> 1 Chronicles 15-17; Song of Songs 1 The ark is brought to Jerusalem and God makes a covenant with David.</p>	

## Sermon Notes

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### July Book Recommendation

#### ***Take and Read – Spiritual Reading: an annotated list by Eugene H. Peterson***

I always like learning more about the reading lists of Christians and biblical scholars whose work I rely on. This book is a journey through the reading lists of Eugene Peterson. I'm sure that my spiritual journey would take a giant leap forward if I managed to read everything on this list. Of course, it has taken him a lifetime and he started much younger than I! I think you'll enjoy reading his comments on all these books. There are categories here for everyone, including some that seem hardly "spiritual," at least as we tend to use the word. Who'd ever think to find *A Canticle for Liebowitz* and murder mysteries!

#### **Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.**

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at [sengle@standrewcccl.org](mailto:sengle@standrewcccl.org).

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by talking about what I've called the art of reading Scripture. What do you think I mean? Do agree that it is an art? Why? How important is it that we become better artists in our reading? How would we become better artists? What are three steps you could take in the coming months to become a better artist, a better reader, of Scripture?
2. Have you experienced the problem of over-reading Scripture, seeing things in it that aren't really there? Is this a problem at some times or on some occasions or with some books more than others? How about under-reading? Is this a bigger problem for you? How would you know if you are over-reading or under-reading?
3. You might discuss what it means to heal the whole person. As I mentioned in the study, the Jews did not make neat distinctions between body and soul or body and spirit. We are still children of the enlightenment and very much given to categorization, classification, and compartmentalization. The phrase "wholistic healing" is often heard in the context of eastern religions, such as forms of Buddhism or Hinduism, and in some strands of New Age spirituality or other mumbo-jumbo. What would be some of the hallmarks of a Christian approach to healing of the whole person? What is the relationship of faith to wellness and wellness to faith? How can our healing be more Christ-like?