

**Date: Sunday August 22, 2010**

**Scripture: Luke 13:10-17**

**Title: “More Good News about God”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): God comes to us, reaches out to us, and touches us, just as Jesus cared for the crippled woman**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God loves us just as we are – all of us – from the tops of our heads to the bottom of our very own feet.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

A mother noticed that her three year old son had put on his shoes all by himself. She was proud. But then she noticed that he had put the shoes on the wrong feet. “Oh well,” she thought, “this will be a time to praise him and teach him.” So she said, “Michael, I’m proud of you for putting your shoes on all by yourself.” “Thank you,” he said. Then she added, “But son, you have put your shoes on the wrong feet.” Michael stared at the shoes for several seconds and then looked up at his mom and said, “Don’t tease me mom, I know they are my very own feet” ([www.danggoodjokes.com](http://www.danggoodjokes.com)).

I share that this morning because we will be talking about feet. But first, as I was working on this morning’s sermon and studying our passage from Luke, I ran across another story about Roberta and John. Roberta walked into a pastor’s office bent over and with good reason. Roberta’s life had been one that would paralyze anybody. Although after many years, a lot of therapy, and pastoral care sessions, Roberta was able to walk straight up. Today she is a tall woman with an important

job, a doctorate degree, and a new name. Healing happened in Roberta's life.

John sat ramrod straight in his wheelchair. At age 17, John and a friend had gone on a joyride to celebrate his new driver's license. They wrapped the car around a tree, and John sustained brain-stem damage. Years later, after all the best of medical care and countless hours of physical therapy, John was still wheelchair bound. John always had this question for his pastor: "Why doesn't God heal me? I want to walk again."

Why are some people healed and others who seek healing never seem to find it? It's one of those questions which arise for us as we pray for healing in the midst of illness and affliction that we and others around us experience. There's no easy answer for that question but there are Bible stories that address those issues of "real life", where healing happens and doesn't seem to happen the way we think it should. It's no wonder a passage like the one from Luke this morning brings questions to our minds (Hearn).

And this is the beauty of being part of the United Church of Christ. We don't ignore the questions that arise when we read Bible passages and we don't run from them. We don't try to explain them away. We embrace them, think about them, and learn to live with them. So here are some questions I have pondered working with this morning's scripture from the Gospel of Luke.

First, we read the words in this passage about the crippled woman, "When Jesus saw her, he called her over ..." (Luke 13:12a). When he called her, how close

do you think she got to him? The text doesn't say, but isn't it reasonable to assume that Jesus would let her get close? I imagine so. In fact, it would be near enough that a moment later he touches her.

But let me ask you this, do you think he would have called her over without looking her in the eyes? Jesus says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment" (Luke 13:12). Would he have said that standing over her? Remember, she is bent over, unable to stand upright, and this is Jesus we're talking about here. I imagine that he called her over and looked her in straight in the eyes. Doesn't that make sense?

But that leads to another question. How could he look her in the eyes if she is bent over? I'm thinking Jesus had no choice but to get down on his knees—way down on his knees, down in the dirt of the ground on his knees, twist his neck up, and look this woman squarely in her eyes.

Now here's the last question and it's a doozy. The text makes clear that Jesus laid his hands on the woman. The words are, "When he laid his hands on her" (Luke 13:13a). How do you suppose he laid his hands on her? Picture this in your mind. Jesus is on his knees in front of the woman, neck bent and looking at her straight into her eyes. What are his options for laying his hands on her?

I love how theologian Jana Childers describes this part of the passage. She writes that when Jesus laid his hands on the woman, he put his hands on her feet – her very own feet. Softly and tenderly he took hold of those dirty, rough feet with

dried skin, scabs, and broken toe nails that barely capped the crooked toes. These were the only things she had seen for eighteen years. Jesus put his hands on her feet and held her. Then the woman is able to stand up straight and she praises God.

This scene that Luke describes is a dizzy one—a familiar picture taken out of its frame and put back in upside down just as Jesus does so well with all situations where we find him, taking everything and turning it upside down. Ancient Israel had an idea of God and of holding onto God at all costs. We can relate to the concept of a God who we hold on to. Some feminist theologians have suggested that we are like children who throw our arms around God's ankles or cling to the skirt of God. That's a reassuring image, but Luke introduces us to God who gets down on hands and knees with us. Luke's God is a God who runs to grab hold of the neck of the prodigal son and now grasps the feet of a broken daughter. God bends to us when we cannot even lift our own head. Now that's my idea of God.

Yes, we have a God, Luke assures us, who is soft, empathic and gentle; whose kindness is unfathomable. We have a God who kneels, looks, and loves before faith kicks in and when it gives out. Don't let anybody say that we have to scrape ourselves together and run to God or dig deep and find our faith and offer it to God before God will speak. We have a God who loves us, who yearns for us, and who comes to us and cares for us. Our God gets on our level and does so with amazing grace.

It may be possible to overstate God's power. That's an interesting theological problem. But according to Luke today, there is no overstating the tenderness of

God's love. I'll say it again. There is no overstating the tenderness of God's love. Or the healing power of that tenderness. And while healing doesn't always happen exactly as we envision, with God, it happens in the way we most need.

Jana Childers also shares a story about a little girl living in a rural community. She lived in one of those towns where driving down Main Street is like driving back into the thirties. She lived in a little house and went to an old school. She had loving parents and, from time to time, a good teacher. But the way she was growing up was not the way you would want your little girl to grow up. She had a cleft palate and the money for the surgery wasn't there. By the time she was seven, she knew things about the world. She had heard the phrase, "only a mother could love that" and she understood it what that meant and lived with it every day.

One day though a special teacher visited the school and put the children through some basic speech tests. When it was her turn, the little girl went into the classroom that had been set aside for the exams.

"Just stand over there by the door," the teacher said from her desk at the far end of the room. "I want to test your hearing first. Turn your back, face the door and tell me what you hear me say."

"Apple," the teacher said in a low voice. "Apple," the little girl repeated.

"Man," the teacher said. "Man," the little girl repeated.

"Banana." "Banana."

The test went on like this with other words.

“Okay,” the teacher said, “Now a sentence.” The child knew that the sentences were usually fairly easy—she wasn’t the first child to take the test and she’d heard you could expect something like, “The sky is blue” or “Your shoes are brown.” Still, she was a good student and so she listened very carefully.

Standing there, with her face against the door, eyes closed, and concentrating hard, she heard the teacher whisper, “I wish you were my little girl (Childers).”

God saw one of his little children in today’s passage from Luke and that is the same God who sees all of us as his children. Before, between, and after we reach out in faith; before, between and even when we don’t deserve it, God reaches out to us. We are all children of a God who loves us as her own. We belong to God, just as we are, from the very top of our heads, right down to our very own feet. And that is today’s good news about God. Praise be to God. Let us pray.

Lord,

We give thanks for your amazing love and grace. You come to us and find us when we are lost and broken. You make us whole. We offer our gratefulness. And we do so in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offering: Let us now give our offering for God who loves us as her own and loves us unconditionally. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Loving God, we ask that you accept these gifts that come from us and that these gifts be used to bring healing and wholeness as they are blessed by you and your amazing grace. So we pray, Amen.

Benediction: There's nothing else to say. God's amazing grace is bestowed on us and we give thanks. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Childers, Jana; Lectionary Homiletics; [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com); 2010.

**Hearn, Janice;** Lectionary Homiletics; [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com); 2010.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Website; [www.danggoodjokes.com](http://www.danggoodjokes.com); 2010.