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**C: Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost / Lectionary 21 / Proper 16
Luke 13:10-17**

**21 August 2022
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Free at Last!”

A few weeks ago we talked about the Latin phrase “incurvatus in se”.
Who remembers what that means?

Correct. “Curved in on oneself.”

It’s a phrase used to describe the underlying nature of all sin.

It’s that self-interest that accompanies even the most selfless of human acts.

And it affects us both as individuals and as groups.

Last time we focused primarily on how that tendency to curve inwards affects the groups,
the bubbles in which we live.

But today’s image of a woman completely bent over by a crippling disease,
gives us a chance to dig deeper into how that sin affects us on an individual, personal level.

So think about what it would have been like to be that woman.

It is likely that it was a progressive disease, perhaps osteoporosis,
that was scarcely noticeable in the beginning,

but that over time became more and more pronounced until she was entirely crippled.

And because the disease was insidious and progressive, she learned to adapt to it,

and once she adapted to it, it became hard to imagine anything different,

and if you can’t imagine it, you cannot walk into your healing. .

Sin can cripple us in much the same manner, beginning in small barely perceptible ways,
but progressing until it has crippled our lives.

And yet because of the insidious and subtle progression of sin in our lives, we adapt to it.

And we forget what it’s like to be healthy and whole and free.

Sometimes the sin which cripples us can be in our bodies.

Sometimes it can be in our minds.

Sometimes it can be in our hearts.

And sometimes it can be in our spirits.

The sin which cripples our bodies is often the most visible,

but it often doesn’t originate in our bodies

Our bodies can simply reflect the sin, the sickness, the disease in our minds or hearts or spirits.

Now of course not every bodily illness can be healed

because at some point in all of our lives some physical part of us will cease to work

and we will die - that’s the nature of our physical universe.

But most of our illnesses can be healed by God, either through prayer alone,

or through prayer accompanied by the medical treatments through which God works.

But if our bodies continue to suffer one disease after the other,

chances are good that the healing that is needed may be in our minds or hearts or spirits,

and once that healing is accomplished the body will also be healed.

I could say a lot more about physical healing

but for now let’s move on to the sin that cripples our minds.

God created us to be in relationship with God so that we can continually learn and grow.
So the sin that cripples our minds is the one that closes our minds and keeps us from growing.

People who have open minds,
 who are willing to admit that what they have believed in the past was wrong,
 who are always willing to learn new things and think about things in new ways,
 who are willing to let God lead them into new understandings,
 are people who have adopted what is known as a growth mindset.
People who have closed minds, who believe they have always been right,
 who aren't interested in learning new things or thinking about things in new ways,
 who think they already know what God wants,
 are people who have adopted what is known as a fixed mindset.

An experiment was performed with seventh graders who were having difficulty with math.

One group received eight hours over eight weeks of traditional study help,
 focusing on math and study habits.

The other group received two hours over eight weeks of open mindset training,
 which focused on getting the kids to understand that the brain is like a muscle
 and anyone can learn anything if they work that muscle and believe they can.

79% of all the children that improved were from the group that learned to have a growth mindset.

The more closed we are to allowing God to change our minds, the more our lives will be crippled by sin.

The closing of our minds can be subtle and insidious and progressive
 and if unchecked will end up crippling us to the point at which
 we can't even remember what it was like to have the open mind of a child.

But when we are open to listening and learning & allowing God to change and renew and transform our minds,
 then we will once again discover the child-like wonder and curiosity and delight
 in learning something new every day so that we will be better able to reflect God's light with the world.

As Paul writes in Romans 12:28, "...be transformed by the renewing of your minds..."

Sin doesn't only cripple our bodies and our minds, but sin can cripple our hearts.
It cripples our hearts in 2 ways.

First, our hearts become crippled when we don't love God above all others.

Many people say they love God more than anyone else and yet they may in fact love a human person more.

The truth is, if there is anyone in our lives that we need, anyone we can't live without,
 anyone we idolize, anyone we are totally focused on,
 anyone whose departure from our lives would leave us totally devastated,
 then that person has become our god.

Often I've heard people say that once they have that particular person, THEN they will be content and fulfilled,
 but a relationship that is based on need and dependency
 will be one that is bent in on itself, crippled and limited in its joy and in the impact it can have for God.

The truth is that it is only when a person is content and fulfilled with God alone first,
 that they will be able to experience a liberating joy in their relationship,
 and a life giving impact on the world through their relationship.

Second, our hearts become crippled when we confine our love to certain people –
 to those who love us, or those in our bubbles, or those who agree with us,
 or those who look like us, or think like us, or act like us.

Anytime we draw a line between those we are willing to love and those we are not, sin is crippling our hearts.

And finally, sin can cripple our spirits.

How do we know if our spirits are crippled?

Well, here's a list...

- If we are not spending time talking with God each day
- If we are not actively watching and listening for God each day
- If we are not talking with others about God
- If we are not gathering with others to worship
- If we are not gathering with others to pray from our hearts
- If we are not gathering with others to study God's Word,
- If we don't see evidence of our minds being renewed
- If we don't feel evidence of our hearts being repaired
- If we don't experience evidence of our spirits being restored
- If we do not find ourselves being led down new paths,
meeting new people, having new experiences, doing new things

At the end of each day we should be able to look back and see God at work in some new way

If we can't, then likely sin is working subtly and insidiously to cripple us,
to keep us from experiencing the joy of the abundant life Jesus offers
and to keep us from telling others about the Source of that joy.

Sin, incurvatus in se, is always at work, crippling our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits,
so subtly and insidiously over time that we learn to adapt to our bent lives.

But no matter what state we are in or how long we've been in it,
Jesus comes today, right here and right now, to set you free
from the limited life you've been living.

Jesus comes to lay hands on you and heal you,
so that no longer bent in upon yourself, you can stand up, straight and strong and tall,
free to enjoy the abundant life Jesus offers,
and free to walk and run and leap and dance,
in praise and thanks for the God of boundless power and endless love
who comes to set us free. Amen!