

Wesley United Methodist Church

August 25, 2013

One Sabbath day, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman was there who was severely disabled. Her body was all bent over that her head was nearly even with her waist. Luke tells us she could not straighten up at all. That strikes me as an unbelievably situation. Forgetting the pain and the inconvenience of not being able to straighten one's body, imagine what that would do to yourself image. Imagine not just the physical pain, but the emotional pain of this kind of deformity of the entire body.

If you have any compassion at all or any ability to empathize with another human being, you can't help but hurt for this woman. She was terribly disabled, but you also have to admire her. She did not allow her physical condition to keep her from worshipping God.

Notice how our story begins, "One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman was there who was severely disabled. Her body was all bent over." Even with her deformity she was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. I admire her. I wonder if I would have that kind of courage to be in public with that kind of condition. Even more important she had not allowed her physical condition to impair her relationship with God. She had been this way for eighteen years all bent over and unable to rise up. The pain was sometimes severe. Yet, her habit was to be in worship to praise her Maker. That's faith. That's devotion.

I know people who will miss church if they have a slight headache. Or if there is a thread of a little rain or the thread of sunshine for that matter for there are so many other things you can do when the weather is nice. But there was this woman where she was supposed to be on this particular Sabbath: in worship. And because she was there, she received a very special blessing from God.

Now I know I'm preaching to the choir about being in worship. You believe in worship or you wouldn't be here today. And nobody forced you to be here. Well, maybe a spouse or a parent... However, I'm glad we don't live in earlier times when missing worship was a punishable offence.

You may be familiar with Jamestown, VA, the first permanent settlement in the new world. Some of their religious practices were rather interesting. For instance, they had two hour church services every day, and for five hours on Sunday, and everybody had to attend. Missing church was considered a sin and was dealt with severely.

The penalty for missing a service was the food rations for a whole day. A second absence resulted in a public whipping. And the penalty for missing three times was to be placed in the stocks daily for six months! Historians tell us that research has not revealed anyone in Jamestown Colony ever missing church three times.

Well, I imagine not. I believe we could improve our attendance if we instituted such a system. Obviously we would never do that even if we could. But missing worship really is serious business. Attendance in worship is a witness to our faith in Christ. Attendance in worship encourages others. Nothing is more discouraging to a first-time visitor than a half empty church. But just as importantly, God is waiting in this place to bless you, to heal you, to strengthen you. This woman would have missed the healing touch if she had not been in worship that day.