



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Reclaimed, Restored, Renewed

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*A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 58, verses 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.*

*The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 13, verses 10-17*

*Now Jesus 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.*

### DATE

The Fourteenth Sunday  
after Pentecost  
Sun., Aug. 21, 2016

### PREACHER

The Rev. Kate Heichler

### READINGS

Isaiah 58:9b-14  
Luke 13:10-17

I'm not a baseball player, but I know a good pitch when I see one – and today's readings are a perfect pitch for your new Associate Rector for Worship and Outreach. We have a beautiful story of healing set in worship, and from Isaiah a powerful reminder of the connection between what we call outreach and God's mission to heal and restore this world.

Something happened in that synagogue that day that no one expected. And not everyone approved.

The synagogue leader thought he had God figured out. He knew the rules. "You can be healed six days of the week."

But who is to contain the Holy Spirit? If the very nature of the holy God is wholeness, healing is going to break out whenever and wherever God is ... and in that synagogue that day, God was there, in Jesus.

It is God's nature to make whole what has become broken, less than whole. The God we came here today to worship is a God who heals.

Jesus, whom our scriptures call the most perfect expression of God we will know this side of glory, was simply being true to his godly nature when he saw that bent over woman in the synagogue that day.

*Continued*

He didn't ask, "What day of the week is this?" He didn't say, "Hmm – will people find it disruptive if I heal her?" He didn't say, "Gee, I wonder if it is God's will to heal her?" He said, "Now there's someone I can restore." He said, "Every day is a good day for God to bring life into this world." He called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free." He spoke her healing into being, and then he confirmed it by laying hands on her in prayer. And it was so. Immediately she straightened up – and then she did the most natural next thing: she began praising God.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy Name.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits.  
God forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities;  
God satisfies you with good things, and your youth is renewed like an eagle's.*

Healing is God's mission in this world, the mission God launched in Jesus Christ and continues in the power of God's Spirit working through us.

Here is how I like to define the mission of God: to reclaim, restore and renew all of creation to wholeness in Christ.

What does this look like? Say you saw an old piece of furniture discarded on the side of the road—scratched and dinged, parts missing and broken off but still recognizable as furniture—say a dresser. You decide to reclaim it—take it off the refuse heap, carry it home. You restore it—which can be traumatic, replacing parts, stripping off layers of paint that obscure its true beauty, shining it to a high gloss, making it both useful and lovely again. Restoration can be rough—on furniture and on people. And you renew its purpose, perhaps even repurposing it for a new use. You have reclaimed, restored and renewed it. It has been set free to be what it was meant to be.

That's what God has done for us, in Christ.

We may not be crippled like the woman in our story, but each of us carries some wounds, some hurts, some dings and broken pieces, some old shame, some places that need to be restored. What is that for you?

Some of us may feel forgotten, that no one claims us as her or his own. The Good News we proclaim here, and everywhere, is that we have been claimed. Reclaimed, restored, renewed. Set free to be who we were intended to be.

*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong.*

And what do we do as those who have been reclaimed, restored, renewed? We become conduits of that transforming love for others. We become the means by which God's mission of restoration gets lived out. Our call is simply to participate in that mission of God—we don't have to come up with "our mission." We live out God's mission. As they say, "God's church doesn't have a mission. God's mission has a church."

So what do we do? It's not complicated.

We just look around both for those who are in need of being reclaimed, restored and renewed, and for where we see the Spirit of God at work doing that. At that intersection we participate in God's mission.

In a few weeks, we will welcome a family to Washington. We don't yet know their names or even where they come from, but we know that they have been forced to flee their home to stay alive. We know they have witnessed unimaginable violence, and suffered unfathomable loss. We know they have been living for years in refugee camps or making their way on the streets. They have lost home, jobs, friends and family, property, beloved possessions, their communities, places of worship, a whole network of social support. Here they will find they've lost their language, status and context for identity. They will need much more than the home and furnishings we are so generously collecting. They need to be reclaimed, restored and renewed, given new purpose.

And they will need healing. Like all the other 65.3 million refugees—I'll say that again and we can try to wrap our minds around it – like 65.3 million displaced persons slowly making their way to safe haven, all their energies have gone to survival. Once they finally find themselves in a safe place and a home, once the immediate terror has subsided, the physical and emotional wounds come to the surface, and they too need to be healed.

In Stamford, where I came from, an interfaith coalition has just welcomed a Syrian family of six, which includes a 16-year-old who is in a wheelchair, paralyzed from gunshot wounds. Nadia has now had two surgeries with a hope of being able to walk again, but the trauma she and her family have survived must also be healed if she is to be set free. Here at St. Columba's, we are not just a refugee hosting committee—we are agents of God's healing and transformation, agents in God's mission.

*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.*

Healing can break out in any and every place where the Spirit of God is present through the Body of Christ. That's us, folks – Christ's hands and feet and eyes and ears and voice of love in the world now.

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, we don't have to think, "Oh, this isn't the time or place for prayer," or "I'm not the right person." We can just go, "Oh yeah, I know the right person. And he'll show up anytime I invoke his name. Come, Lord Jesus."

We will do that here, during communion.

We can do that at coffee hour.

We can do it at Water Ministry.

We can do it in our homes and workplaces and places we play.

I want us to be known as "repairers of the breach, the restorer of streets" for all kinds of reclaimed, restored and renewed people to live in. That may mean going beyond meeting needs to changing structures so the needs no longer exist. Whatever the nature of what we call outreach, it is healing work.

And it starts here, in worship, in this holy place, and flows out with us into the world. That day in the synagogue, God was present in Jesus. In this place, today, God is present through you, through me, by the power of Christ's Holy Spirit living in each one of us.

When we are baptized, Christ takes up residence in us. He's here right now. What happened in the temple that day – surprising, shocking – can happen at worship any time, as we are alive to the power of God's Spirit and awake to where people need to be set free, reclaimed, restored, renewed.

It can happen here today. I hope you will bring your hurts for healing, that by your healed wounds others may be restored.

God desires that we be set free of everything that keeps us from being fully the beloved people of God we were created to be.

And here's the promise:

*And you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

Bring it on!

Amen.