

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt:**

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do give thanks for the gift of your Son Jesus, who sees us in our bondages and in oppressions and calls us to Himself and sets us free from our ailments in order that we might praise you and stand up straight in His life and love, and joy. And so we ask that the ministry and preaching of your word might have the same effect in our lives, that we might be liberated from whatever it is that holds us down so that we can praise you with all uprightness and joy. And we bless you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, happy rally day. This is pretty exciting. I don't know how many kids you just counted, but it looked like about 50 or 60 to me, which that's a lot of children. Maybe we should pray for those who are ministering to them today.

I was talking to one of our ladies that helps out with the children's church in the back, and she was a little nervous about today, which is great. Good problems. I just came back from vacation, and one of the books that I read on vacation was actually a book about deliverance. It's called Deliverance. It was written by Francis McNutt, who

started Christian Healing Ministry right here in Jacksonville. Francis and Judith, very prominent leaders in the healing ministry. Unfortunately, Francis has gone to be with the Lord. I would have liked to have met him in person. I hear he was just an amazing man of God.

I'm currently doing several healing school trainings at Christian Healing Ministry. So in a week or so, I'm going to be doing level two. So I did level one in this book as part of the training. And it actually talks about what we just read about in the gospel passage, that there are times in which people have spiritual entities or beings or demons or however you want to put it that are holding them down, and the term is oppressing them.

And so the Deliverance book is all about how do we have a ministry of deliverance from these oppressive forces.

And I'll have to be honest with you. This has not been an area of my own ministry. I certainly have had the experience of interacting with people that I

felt like were demonically possessed. And I was actually at a healing conference where we were all sort of lined up, and the intention was to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And Judith McNutt was walking down the aisle. And a few people down, there was this woman that started to growl at Judith McNutt in a really scary voice. And Judith went to battle with a spiritual demonic force in this woman. And I was praying, and I was like, Lord, just keep the demon away from me. Whatever-- I don't really understand what's happening here, but all I know is I don't want the demon, Lord, just whatever the demon's going to do. Just get the demon away. And so sure enough, it was like one of those passages in the Bible, kind of like the one from today, where that demon left.

And the woman was in her right mind. I understand what that term means, that when somebody has been liberated from a spiritual oppressive force, suddenly they can be in their right mind. And I witnessed that happen. And I've had multiple experiences like that, but never been on the ministry side of casting out demons. Apparently, that's level three of the healing schools, by the way. So we haven't gotten to that training. So don't expect me to be doing anything yet. But soon, we can be doing this kind of ministry here. And I'm halfway kidding. One of the things about Jesus--

and this is an aspect of his ministry. Every time it describes his ministry in the scriptures, it says, he went about doing good works.

He was always preaching the gospel, in other words, announcing that the kingdom of God has come, and leading people to that relationship with the Lord. Obviously, an aspect of his ministry was forgiveness of sins. That's why he died on the cross, was to forgive as far as sins.

But one of the things that it consistently says throughout the pages of the scriptures is that he went about setting people free from the power of the devil.

That he actually was releasing captives who were oppressed by spiritual powers and forces of evil.

And in our baptismal promises and vows that we take, we acknowledge three forms of evil.

We renounce the spiritual forces of evil, Satan, and demonic powers and forces in the spiritual realm. And that's the first renunciation, whenever somebody gives their life to the Lord in baptism in the Episcopal Church. The second is evil powers of this world, which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. And then the third are sinful desires that draw us from the love of God. And I sort of look at those as an unholy trinity, that these are the three evils that are conspiring against the people of this world and the people of God, and trying to hold us down and to keep us in bondage to evil and to sin. And it's what we're always having to contend with is the liberation of people from oppressive powers. And so here's Jesus. He's preaching at a synagogue. And I'm not sure how many people were there, but apparently, there was a crowd there, not unlike today.

And Jesus notices this particular woman in the crowd.

And it describes her as having a spirit of ailment.

Now this is a spiritual power, an oppressive force in her life, an oppressive entity.

And this spirit is causing her to physically hunch over.

One of the definitions of oppression is something that holds you down. It prevents you from, in a sense, standing up straight. And so literally this woman was being physically held down by this spirit. And it says that she had been in this situation for 18 years. This was a chronic oppression in her life.

Now I think for those who are a little nervous about these kinds of things or praying for people with healing, particularly when it comes to people that have chronic type things, if they have had an oppression or a sickness for 18 years,

a lot of us lack faith to think that they could be healed. And we're like, well, that's just a longstanding pattern in that person's life. Well, maybe that's just

the way that they're just going to have to live with that. And some people, that's certainly the case. I mean, even in the Bible, you have the apostle Paul. He describes that he had a thorn in the flesh, that he constantly was asking God to remove from his life. But for some reason, the Lord didn't remove this particular chronic thing that Paul described as his thorn in the flesh. And so yes, there are occasions where God, for some reason, doesn't heal chronic things.

But this is what the text says.

Jesus saw her.

I'll just stop right there for a second.

He saw her.

And I think that is very meaningful.

Because with respect to all of us, we might have something in our life.

And I will dare say this. It is all of us. All of us have some thing that we would love for God to take away, that we would love for the Lord to set us free from, or to help us with.

And it may be a relational thing. It could be a physical thing. It could be a spiritual bondage. It could be a pattern or a habit that we don't like about ourselves. But whatever it is, isn't it wonderful to just meditate and contemplate on the idea that Jesus sees you?

He sees you and that thing, whatever that is. And so he says he saw her.

And then he was not content to just see her in that condition.

But in his discernment, he recognized her problem. And with the word, Jesus said, you are freed from your ailment.

And that demonic power and force, no matter what it was,

it just left her.

People in our day, we do know intuitively and instinctively that we are complex creatures, that our spiritual life and our mental health and our emotional well-being and our emotional health, as well as our physical health, are all intricately tied together. I had a hospitalist that was a member of my congregation in Lake Mary. And I asked him, I said, how many people-- a hospitalist, by the way, is the one that goes around and does the rounds in the hospital. He works for the hospital as a doctor. And I said, how many people do you think in the hospital have some kind of spiritual thing related to their physical issue?

And he said 90%.

Now, that's anecdotal. But then I googled it, which, of course, is absolutely true.

(Laughter) And what Google told me as I was thinking-- preparing this, is it says that when people have chronic physical things, that about 30% of those people have mental or spiritual type related things. Maybe they're depressed or anxiety or discouraged, or whatever it is. But there is also presenting spiritual type things that go along with the physical. But this was very interesting. And I was kind of surprised that it backed up the hospitalist. He said-- or Google said that when somebody has a spiritual health or a mental health type issue, emotional, when it's kind of like soulish,

that it's 75% to 90% will also have concurrent physical challenges and problems.

That our spirits, whatever those conditions are, impact our physical health and well-being. And that was certainly the case with this woman, where he or she had something spiritual going on in her life. And we don't know why. You know, we can wholly imagine. Well, what happened to her 18 years ago that would have led to her getting this demon and picking up this bondage in her life? Something must have happened. And that's one of the things I see in the Deliverance book. It talks about the different types of spirits. And some are

related to trauma. Some are related to a sin that somebody did. And the shame of that just kind of lets open the foothold to the evil one. It might be some unforgiveness or hurt, and where they're angry and suddenly Satan gains a foothold in their life. But whatever it is that happened to this woman that 18 years prior, we don't know. But what we do know is that Jesus had the power to set her free with the word.

Woman, today, you are set free from your ailment. And he laid hands on her. And that is something that, to this day, we continue to do when we pray for people for healing, is we often will-- I think of it as like a spiritual handshake. You lay hands on a person, maybe on their shoulder. I think it's always appropriate to ask before you do this. But you lay hands on somebody and you just pray for them for healing. And Jesus does this. And the woman who-- what the text said-- this is very interesting.

It says she's quite unable to stand up. She had something oppressing her that made her quite unable. In Greek, the Greek word there is "dynamus" which is what we get our word dynamite from. And it has to do with power. She did not have the power to stand up straight in and of herself.

And later, Jesus says she was tied up by Satan.

And when Jesus lays his hands on her, all of the sudden, she is able-- she has power now-- to straighten herself up. And she breaks forth into spontaneous praise.

Now, we talked about spiritual powers of oppressive, but we also know that there are systemic and worldly oppressive powers as well. And Jesus is not just wanting to liberate individuals from spiritually oppressive powers, but he also wants to liberate people from worldly and corrupt systems of power that are manifest in human relationships. And so when the woman is healed on the Sabbath day, the synagogue leader says, oh, we can't have any of that kind of thing happening, which reminds me of that joke that I've told probably three or four times already here about the woman that was in the back that yells out, hallelujah during one of the sermons. And she does it again, hallelujah. And one of the ushers comes up to her-- I think it might have been Lee Harrimus, but he comes up to her and he says, ma'am, we don't do that

kind of thing here. You can't be doing that kind of yelling out in this kind of church. And she says, well, I can't help it. I found the Holy Spirit. And the usher says, well, you didn't find them in here.

And that's the synagogue leader in this story. He's like, we can't be having miracles happening in church. That's just not appropriate. If you want to get healed, you need to do that on a different day of the week. You cannot be doing that on the Sabbath day. There will be no healing in church today.

It's forbidden.

And Jesus, in a word like he liberated this woman, actually liberated an entire church with a word. And he makes a fool of the leader with a little bit of a story. He says, you hypocrite, would you not unbind your ox or donkey if it needed water and take him and give him water on the Sabbath?

And yet you would keep this woman who has been tied up and bound up by Satan, a daughter of Abraham, for 18 years.

And you would prevent her from experiencing the gift of living water on the Sabbath day.

Shame on you.

And when all the people saw that Jesus had put that religious leader in his place,

they all stood up straighter that day.

And they, too, like the woman, began to praise and rejoice in the Lord.

And this is the vision of what the Lord is wanting to do in his church and with people in general.

He wants our hearts and our minds and our lives and even our physical bodies to experience the joy and the abundant life that comes from knowing him.

And if we're not about that as a congregation and as a people, then we're really missing something. We actually are part of the problem and not part of the solution for God's plans for this world. He wants to pour out his Holy Spirit upon the people of the church and in the world and so that God's presence is filling all in all, and that the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit begins to work in people's lives and the authority of Jesus comes into households and families,

things that maybe are as deep as your childhood

can be things that can be healed in the name of Jesus Christ.

And so part of it is important for us as the people of God to not let God off the hook to heal us.

And I think this is one of the big problems in our day and age, is that we're so afraid to be disappointed with God that we actually never ask him to do the miraculous works that we see promised in the Scriptures.

And we don't want to be disappointed, so we just won't ask for healing. Well, guess what? When you don't ask for healing, guess what happens? People don't get healed.

But when you start to engage the Scriptures in the Word and ask for the Holy Spirit of God to work,

many people do get liberated and healed.

And the Lord would see that happen here at St. Mark's in the life of our congregation, our community, our city. Even things that have been around for 18 years, he would love to dispense with them with the Word if we'll let him.

And so for some of us, this may just mean that we need to stand up a little straighter in the way that we interact with the evil one. There's a great verse that's worth memorizing from the book of James. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." It's an easy



thing to say. You want to say it with me? "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." Just commit that to memory, because even any individual Christian, if you have the Holy Spirit in your life, you have way more power, dynamite, dynamus in you than Satan has in his ability to control you. But for some, we need help. And we need one another to draw alongside in our lives and to have the spiritual gifts of discernment and healing to be able to see these things in one another's lives and to pray and ask God to liberate one another. And this is part of what it means to be in a spirit-filled community, is to seek the healing and the blessing of God as a people, and to watch as the Lord has stand up straight as we get set free from the evil one, and rejoice and praise his name because of the gift of freedom that we have been given.