

The Day There Was Simply Too Much Jesus
Luke 13:10-17

Too much Jesus can make us uncomfortable. Such is the case in the synagogue this morning, when Jesus comes to town. I imagine they had heard of Jesus, been entertained by his teaching, his parables, been amazed by a miracle or two.

And if Jesus had just sort of slipped in the back and not disrupted anything, that would have been just fine. But you see, that's the problem with Jesus: if we are not careful, he can disrupt almost everything: our traditions, the way we experience the world, the attitudes we have, how we treat our neighbors, how we treat our enemies, and all sorts of stuff like that.

And so it came to pass that on this day, for many in the synagogue on this day, there was simply too much Jesus, for when Jesus comes to town you have to make a decision: throw away everything you thought you knew about God or throw Jesus away. And we notice that on this day in the synagogue, some want more of Jesus, and some will end up feeling as if they already had had too much of him.

And make no mistake about it, Jesus' actions were provocative; as suddenly a comfortable worship service becomes a defining moment of faith: what does it mean to believe in God? What does it mean to live a life faithful to God? Does it mean keeping certain laws? Or does it mean something else? All this is called into question because Jesus has come to town.

Now let me tell you what has been going on in the Biblical narrative leading up to this day: Jesus has been teaching and Jesus has been calling people to repent.

But repentance in Jesus' mind means much more than we usually think it does. Most Christians have taken a narrow view of such a word: lost the depth of the original Greek *metanoia*. For most Christians, repentance, *metanoia* means merely to being sorry for our sins and promising to do better or even acknowledging our sins and asking forgiveness. Now, to know our sin and to be sorry for our sin is important. It keeps us from becoming brittle judging scolds.

But there is a deeper meaning to this word. At its root it means: to change one's understanding.

And at its deepest level, repentance means to change one's understanding in such a way as to let Jesus be front and center in your thoughts, your attitudes, your actions, and your expectations.

And so, without using the word repentance, Jesus' coming to the synagogue calls forth a decision on the part of the people: Dare they repent, in the deepest understanding of the word... dare they change their understanding... and understand that Jesus is the in whom truth, and life, and faith abide? Or will too much Jesus get in the way of how they have always done things?

It all begins innocently enough. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. No problem. But now a woman appears.

Now that was not unusual. Unlike in later years, women were welcome to worship in the synagogue.

Jesus notices her. Most there saw this as an intrusion . Jesus saw this as an opportunity. An opportunity to show what perceiving God the way Jesus perceives God might mean. The woman is bent over. . . bent over with a spirit that had made her unable to stand up straight.

A spirit. Did you ever notice that in the New Testament miracles never just stand there alone so that we can be overwhelmed by God's power? No, miracles always have a spiritual component. She was not just doubled over physically, but spiritually as well. Have you ever been there? Felt alone, felt as if God somehow has forgotten about you?

Jesus proclaims God has not forgotten anyone. Notice what Jesus does. He touches her. Contact, caring, noticing. He calls her a daughter of Abraham, giving her status. Though she is wounded, among the least of those in worship, we surmise, Jesus gives her place. She is a daughter of Abraham; in other words, a person special to God, despite her infirmity.

Oh, would you let me digress for a moment? We will find out that this spirit has come from Satan. But let us not take that to mean that every problem comes from Satan. Why in the previous verses in this Chapter 13 problems are said to have been caused by, accident. . . an evil man . . . and even God himself is seen as one who is going to pronounce judgment upon the unfruitful. But back to the story.

Now if you know anything about Jewish faith, you know that Sabbath keeping is essential. And rightly so, because it was in the keeping of the Sabbath in exile in Babylon, and under Greek and Roman occupation, that the Jewish people said: we are first and foremost God's people.

Then Jesus does something shocking. He works on the Sabbath. He heals, and healing is work. The people are shocked: she's been sick for 18 years. Would one more day matter? And they are correct, from their perspective.

But Jesus challenges us with a new perspective. It is always the right to do God's will. It is always the right time to do battle with Satan, always the right time to offer compassion, always the right time to offer hope and new beginnings.

And of course he points out that even in the strict law of the Sabbath there is room for compassion. Even on the Sabbath you do work, you untie an ox and a donkey and lead them to water, so they will not suffer. And that's allowed. So how could we possibly think God would not allow Jesus to perform a work of mercy? Presumably, this woman was at least of equal value to a donkey.

In Jesus, this bent woman is made straight. And she begins a new life: continually praising God.

But did you notice? The woman is ecstatic, as are many in the synagogue. The entire crowd is rejoicing at all the wonderful things he was doing. Yet there is a darker side to all this.

Jesus has now made more enemies. Those who chastised him for putting compassion and healing ahead of Sabbath Law. Those who chastised him for placing a new beginning above old tradition. He puts them to shame, Luke tells us, but make no mistake, opposition to Jesus will continue to grow. And eventually this

opposition will lead to a cross.

And we wonder at the vehemence of those who opposed him. And it comes down to this. The teaching of Jesus, the way of Jesus, the action of Jesus, was just too much for them.

Jesus was asking them to change too much tradition, change too many attitudes. He was calling them to reorient themselves to God, not according to Law, Scripture, and tradition, but according to him. And Jesus was too much.

And let's be careful here. Because we get in the habit of talking about a battle between religious people and secular people, and yes, that battle rages today. But in our Scripture lesson, the battle is between religious people and Jesus.

How much Jesus is too much Jesus? That's the unsettling question for you and me, isn't it? Because we ourselves can be like those religious folk back then: Jesus was welcome among them only if he did not challenge their entrenched religion, their entrenched attitudes.

How much Jesus is too much Jesus for you, for me? Oh, this can lead to all sorts of questions. For instance, how does Jesus influence how much we give to God's work? How does Jesus influence our interaction with our families? How does Jesus influence our views on the environment, our position on illegal immigration, where we stand on homosexuality, how we wrestle with issues of women's rights and the right to life? What about the death penalty?

I'm not saying there is a definitive answer to any of these questions. I'm only pointing out what our Scripture compels us to do: to decide how much Jesus is enough. How much control have we given to him?

And, by the way, as we go about our work, may we let Jesus in. Teachers, as you work with difficult students, may you trust that Jesus can work through you and bring forth new beginnings even in the most surprising of kids. And whatever we do, may we be open for Jesus to surprise us again with his presence and his power.

Today, some had had quite enough, and too much, of Jesus. But others, most of the others, rejoiced at what Jesus had done. And they wanted more of Jesus.

And this woman. Jesus had noticed her, touched her, healed her, given her new life. And you get the sense that she will spend the rest of her life wanting more and more of Jesus.

O, for faith to want the same of myself. Amen.