

## Weight Lifting

Luke 13:10-17; Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sermon by Mag Richer Smith

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### Luke:

<sup>10</sup>Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>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? <sup>16</sup>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?" <sup>17</sup>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.

### Jeremiah:

<sup>4</sup>Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>5</sup>"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." <sup>6</sup>Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." <sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, <sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." <sup>9</sup>Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup>See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

We call it the Ketchup Revolution in our family.

And it happened after my parents had been married for many years and patterns were well established. My dad fixed things and my mom served meals. So one night after we had all started eating dinner, my dad said, "Ketchup."  
(There was no ketchup on the table.)

But there was no response.

So my dad said it again... "Ketchup."

Still it was if my mom didn't hear..  
 Ah! Then a light went on for dad...  
 "KETCHUP PLEASE," he said.  
 But still no response.

And then came his bewildered question,  
 "Are we out of ketchup?"  
 And Mom said, "Not that I know of."

*Dumbfounded*, Dad got up and went to the frig and  
 retrieved his own ketchup.  
 AND it was a NEW DAY! We never went back.  
 Mom continued to cook and serve delicious meals, but to  
 my Dad's credit, he learned that he could fetch things for  
 himself, and a woman became more free!

I am not a fan of the word "resigned."  
 While I know there are some things we cannot change,  
 I hate when we *give in* to a hopeless attitude that says:  
 "THAT'S JUST THE WAY I AM." Or  
 "That's just the way it is!"  
 Our texts today are about a life-altering WORD of the LORD  
 that *transforms, heals and liberates*.

IN the Jeremiah passage the  
 "THE WORD OF THE LORD."  
*calls a young Jeremiah* who is bent with excuses:  
 too young,  
 too inexperienced,  
 too unsure,  
 too unprepared,  
 too terrified...

BUT... *the Word of the Lord that  
Plucks up, Breaks down  
Destroys, Overthrows,  
Builds and Plants...*

WILL assure Jeremiah, that even with all his skepticism and resistance...

he doesn't need to be *afraid* because...  
the great "*I AM*" is "*WITH YOU.*"

"*DO not be afraid of THEM, Jeremiah*" ... "*of THEM*" ...  
of all the oppressive Powers that *think* they are in control  
and try to convince you "*THAT's just the way it is.*"  
Because there is an ALTERNATIVE WAY OF LIBERATING  
GOOD NEWS and I AM putting MY WORD in your mouth.

God is about *dismantling* the POWERS and *plucking up* the  
negative voices THAT KEEP US TRAPPED IN RESIGNATION.  
And God is out ahead of us *building & planting* NEW  
POSSIBILITIES for LIFE and for the Way things can YET be.

Even in the midst of all kinds of RESISTANCE, cynicism, &  
despair,  
the WORD of Yahweh will have its Way and its Day.  
Hear the WORD OF THE LORD, Jeremiah...  
A NEW JERUSALEM is coming!

This past Monday, when that report from the  
UN Panel on Climate Change was released...  
the *MOST DIRE* REPORT yet.

PBS NEWSHOUR *interviewed* a scientist, Rafe Pomerance,  
who has devoted his lifework to this issue, and after he  
talked about how the coral reefs are already dead

and the arctic is *disintegrating* and all the *horrors* that lie ahead if action is not taken NOW...

Well it's very scary when our political powers seem *bent* on deregulation and on *burning* MORE fossil fuels.

Then the interviewer asked this scientist,  
“Are you in despair yet?”

His response interested me...

“That’s not where I go.

I don’t go to DESPAIR.

It may be warranted, but I don’t go there.

I just say the sooner we get at it the better.”

IT reminded me of my friends Earl and Marilyn.

When Earl was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, as a physician, Earl knew how BAD it could get, but he and Marilyn just *made a decision* that they would NOT do fear. Fear is not where they would go.

These acts of WILL in the face of huge difficulties *inspire* me, because I find it easy to *give in to fear and despair* when I keep *hearing* bad news, when the Powers seem *bent* on deathly decisions, and I feel like there is NOTHING I can do.

I saw a poster the other day that said,  
“Mountains are removed one pebble at a time,”  
and I’d like to work harder at *refusing* despair  
and *picking up* THOSE pebbles.

In our Gospel text we have a woman who  
*Carries so much HEAVINESS.*

She shows up for worship, maybe because that's what she *always* does on the Sabbath. There she is in *the back of the back*...because that's where women have to sit.

That's THE place the structures have dictated.

She is the nameless one, who *week after week* goes home to the *same old, same old*, where nothing ever *changes*.

And where her *downcast* eyes see only the floor and the walls and the ground SHE treads.

And that's *just the way it is* ,

and the way it's been for 18 years.

Maybe she DOES have a name, and perhaps we know her when we are so discouraged and can't look up and out anymore.

Maybe she's us when we just *keep getting* hit with BAD NEWS...and the weight of it cowers our ability to hope enough to work for earth repair (that's why we're here, you know, *for earth repair*).

Maybe she's us when we are *resigned* to letting our old wounds fester ...wounds that keep us *focused* on lost opportunities and *roads untaken*.

Maybe she is us when we have *resigned* ourselves to a hopeless and closed future.

We don't know what has caused this woman's slumped shoulders and downcast eyes, but when we *carry the weight of the world on our shoulders*, it takes its toll. After 18 years of the *same old pain*, this bent woman lacks faith and imagination that

the WORD OF THE LORD...

the same word that parted the RED SEA for the slaves...

The Word of the LORD that promises a New Jerusalem...

that that Word and that SPIRIT can make a WAY,

where there is no way!

Is there really a WORD OF LIFE powerful enough to break through encrusted grief, cynicism, fear & despair?

Well on this day the woman *entertains* a "WHAT IF" . . .

On this day the bent woman hears a *shattering CALL* from Jesus to *come out of that back seat*... and let him *touch her* & *free her* from the *heavy burdens* she has carried too long, *free her* to look up & outward and become WHO she was *called to be* in this world.

We ALL know about that seamstress in Montgomery who one day decided she was *too tired to yield* her seat on the bus. Rosa Parks, that stooped woman who always took a back seat, was summoned forward by the Word of the LORD...

by the Power of the Holy Spirit...

by the encouragement of a community of Faith.

And after a lifetime of bondage

she had the audacity to say:

"NO MORE!" No more back seats!

NO more keeping me *down*.

NO MORE getting up from the table to fetch your ketchup!

No *more* being content with despair and hopelessness.

And a whole new movement of freedom was begun!

Christine Blasey Ford would never have thought she would be *called to the CENTER* of the world's attention and be *summoned* to tell her painful story of abuse in such a public

arena. But even though she was terrified, she made that trek to Washington, and even though her testimony has been called “a political hoax,” her COURAGE to say “ME TOO” and “NO MORE, her refusal to acquiesce to *“THAT’s just the way it is”* because *“Boys will be boys!”* ...

Well maybe not. Maybe, because of her courage, it will be just a bit harder for boys to be the kind of boys who *abuse and harass*. Maybe her testimony is one pebble *dismantling* the mountain.

Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights activist from Mississippi who was beaten and jailed in the 1960’s because she was *advocating* for the right for her people to vote.

Fannie Lou came from the poorest section of the poorest state... A sharecroppers’ daughter and one day this woman under the weight of great oppression just said, *“I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.”* And sang out with gusto even behind the prison bars... *“THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE...I’m gonna let it shine!”*

I’m so inspired by those who have heard the Word of the Lord *call them out* of their back seats of despair and free them to be available to make a difference in this world.

We saw the possibility of the detention center *move on out* of Goshen. But that did not happen because people let themselves be *resigned to helplessness* in the face of the Powers.

And when immigrant children at our border were separated from their parents, I am so grateful that I got notes from people here at Berkey, asking what WE were going to DO

about that, and I rejoiced because people here were not acquiescing to *"that's just the way it is."*

We can organize.

We can protest.

We can vote.

And we can gather together and pray and strategize, and we can align ourselves with THE WORD OF THE LORD that *plucks up and destroys, builds and plants*, and is here today to touch our doubting cynicism and to challenge our passive resistance and to *lift the weights* that try to convince us: *"WE CAN'T!"*

So today there's this woman who has carried her despair for 18 years,  
And Jesus is saying,

*"Give me those burdens that keep you awake at night and tied up in knots throughout the day.*

Don't acquiesce to the POWERS who tell you there is nothing you can do about the pain and the injustice and the warming of the planet."

If you can't *tackle the boulders*, at least *work at the pebbles*. Cast your eyes upward. Your help comes from the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Give yourselves to the agenda of earth repair, and at the same time TRUST in the Presence, the mystery, the Spirit who is making *all things NEW*...the Spirit who is here to free us from getting STUCK in weak resignation.

The WORD OF THE LORD is about transformation ...  
*Individual, personal, spiritual transformation...YES!*



And *communal, political, and social transformation*... YES!  
The Word of the Lord brings a new posture,  
new perspective and new identity.

Do you hear *what Jesus calls her*, right there in the  
synagogue with the leader calling his timing "a hoax"?...  
Jesus calls her a "DAUGHTER of ABRAHAM!"

Nowhere else... in the biblical accounts is ANYONE called  
that. There are:

*sons of Abraham*

*seeds of Abraham*

*children of Abraham...*

But today this woman who has always taken her place at  
the back of the back is EMPOWERED. She doesn't need to  
*slump her shoulders in despair* anymore.

Stand up straight and bold! Look up!

Because YOU are a DAUGHTER OF ABRAHAM!

Be free! Be healed!

Be available for the healing agenda you were made for.

Well of course the Powers try to stifle this FREEDOM.

But Jesus ...Jesus *confronts* the Powers head on:

"YOU HYPOCIRTES!...you care more about your animals  
than about the plight of your fellow human beings!

You care more about maintaining YOUR lifestyle than about  
*loving your neighbor*.

You care more about your corporations than about the  
needs of the poor and the good of the earth!

And our story ends with the WORD of the LORD *silencing the Powers*, and the Daughter of Abraham standing TALL.

The WORD of the Lord will pluck up and tear down  
Build and Plant  
Stand tall, people of God!  
BE free!  
Let the Word of the LORD Touch YOUR lips!  
Let the Spirit creating newness empower YOU.  
THAT SPIRIT is moving in OUR midst...

May we get in the way of its wind  
and BE its fire!