**14 Pentecost, Aug. 25, 2013;**[**Luke 13:10-17**](http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=148926994), Rev. Mary S. Trainor

At the Culvers counter there was a little child trying to get the attention of the clerk in order to order an ice cream cone. His parents were seated at their table nearby and had given him some money to get a cup of the flavor of the day. I was watching this scene. The child's head was level with the top of the counter, his neck was craned upward with his eyes eagerly looking up. His view of life was that everyone around him were giants, and the unfamiliar giants did not pay any attention to him. This little guy was treated as invisible. Finally his parents came to his rescue and they got him his ice cream. How does life look from your perspective? Are you able to look eye-to-eye with people? How do others see you? Are you noticed, ignored, invisible, stared at?

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus teaching in a synagogue, and a person enters. She has been "***crippled ..for eighteen years....bent over***." Her perspective in life was different that that little boy at Culvers, and different from ours. She would have seen life looking face down: her view would have been dirt on the ground and people's feet. She would have heard people around her, but not been able to see a person's face or their eyes! How about other people's perspective about her? In her culture she would have been considered unclean because of her ailment. We know, just from our own experience, that strangely misshapen people are stared at and avoided. People would have avoided contact with her, and would have glared at her like she was a freak. She did not ask for anything, did not draw attention to herself , she just quietly entered-- but she got Jesus' attention anyway. Did Jesus stare at her or avoid her? No. He called her over to Him and said, "***you are set free from your ailment."*** She was released, she was freed! Jesus not only restored her to perfect health physically, but He also restored her socially so that she was no longer considered unclean and could be part of the community. What Jesus did here is huge for us too, for each of us is broken in some way too. Each of us has something going on that causes us to be bent over in some way. The Good News is that we have a God who notices us and who sets us free. He wants us ***set free*** so we can be all that He made us to be, so we can fully serve Him out in the environments we live in!

What are some of the things that make you "***bent over***"? Our physical ailments (as significant as they may be) maybe the least of our problems. Maybe you are "bent over" because of physical pain, or maybe you are "bent over" because of being rejected, ridiculed, or having experienced failure in something. Maybe you are "bent over" from guilt or from stress. When we have any of these going on, our perspective on life and the perspective others have of us, are affected! All these factors bring us down, cause us to not live as God planned Regardless of our height or ailments, God wants to lift us up, straight and tall; Psalm 145:14 says, "***The Lord upholds all who fall, and lifts up all who are bowed down."***

A friend of mine told me about a time when he went to church in Hawaii, and saw something remarkable. He said, "The whole congregation stood for the opening hymn and the procession. We all looked down the aisle for the priest and the priest did not come and did not come. We wondered what was going on, and mumbled to each other in our pews. Then, we looked again with more effort and we finally saw the priest. There he was, processing confidently, reverently down the aisle -- well vested in grand vestments, and boldly singing the entrance hymn. He delivered a wonderful sermon. The remarkable thing was the reason why we had not seen him in the aisle: the priest was a little person, a dwarf." My friend and I then discussed about how this man was such a wonderful example of God's transforming power. He had been set free by Christ. Oh, he had not been healed of his ailment -- but he had been released of his sense of inadequacy, his self-consciousness, he had forgiven those who had ridiculed and stared at him. And now, he was fully serving God in the way he had been called; his confidence came from the Lord.

Back to the rest of the Gospel: we read on that after Jesus healed the "***bent over***" woman, the leader of the synagogue became "***indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath.***" The Sabbath laws were so strict that they did not allow any kind of work, even healing prayer, to occur on this day. Jesus challenged this system of rules that were inconsistent with God's true message of love, forgiveness, healing. He helped them understand this through a story they could relate to: how you don't neglect to give your animal water on the Sabbath, and that is work. Therefore you should not neglect those in need either. The people watching rejoiced at this Good News, while the leaders felt ashamed about their mistaken thinking. The leaders were "***bent down***" because of their pride in the laws they had constructed! They held themselves back from experiencing the fullness of God. We can do the same thing in our lives, if we get caught up in things that are inconsistent with Jesus' teaching.

In a few minutes, we will celebrate little Gabriel's Baptism. Jesus' message in the Gospel today connects well to the sacrament of Baptism, for it is through Baptism we are set free and welcomed as Christ's own forever. We are reminded of this as we recite the Baptismal Covenant as part of the Baptism. In it, we are reminded of how we commit to study God's Word, the Bible, and about what it really means to live as a Christian.

After this, our service will continue with Holy Communion. It is through Holy Communion that we receive the real presence of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who releases us from the brokenness that pulls us down.

Today, each of us can be set free from what causes us to be ***bent down***. Just as Jesus noticed and healed the woman who had been bent over for 18 years, Jesus notices you and will heal you, will set you free if you desire it. The only true freedom is freedom in Christ. Amen.