

Luke 13, 10-17



¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

¹⁵ The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

“Oh my! , so you really believe in God?” „ I thought you were just fooling around!“ That’s what a roommate in the asylum seekers’ home asked after his friend told him about the Gospel. “Oh, so you really believe?” We’re all familiar with this question or statement. In another eg. a colleague has known for decades that you go to church. Then one day you start talking about the Christian faith and you explain to your colleague what faith means to you. Suddenly you notice that your colleague seems completely shocked: he too can’t believe that there really is such a thing as faith. “Oh, so you really believe?” Yes, apparently there really is, according to general opinion, a Christian faith that is not really faith, but can only exist with something else, so to speak, to justify itself or to even keep on existing. For example, faith as a tradition, or faith as a family culture, or faith as fun, or even faith as pretext so that I can meet nice people in church or get a German residence permit. But really real faith. Just by itself? Faith in God? Does that exist? Do you really believe?

In his preaching, Jesus was often contrary to those who wanted to use faith as a pretext, so to speak. In his time, it was still fashionable to impress people with your faith. IN his time, you could still impress people by being pious or by formulating long prayers to God. But God was not the intended addressee for these prayer. Instead the addressees were other people who should be captivated and impressed by such prayers. Jesus stood up against such people and exposed their hypocrisy and revealed it as purely human work and false belief. So faith should stand by itself! All by itself. Jesus should be the only one left in the middle of my heart and life. In our reading today, we are introduced to two people who come from completely different situations. Both then stand before Jesus. On the one hand, a woman who is suddenly just there. She had an unclean spirit and could not see the temple, the place where God meets people. The other was a representative of religion. An "insider", so to speak. Someone who was in direct contact with God. A leader of the synagogue. Someone who you could ask all things about God...

First, let's talk about the woman. She is one of many. We are not told who she is or where she comes from. She is suddenly just there. We all know these people who are suddenly just there. Sometimes it is a drug addict begging in front of the church door, sometimes an interested person who wants to hear how to pray to God, sometimes a person who wants to get a glimpse from afar of what church and faith are all about. The woman we are talking about in our sermon text is one of those people too. She comes on a day when everyone goes to synagogue. A Sabbath day. A day of prayer. A day of meeting God. She comes despite her illness. Her body is bent over. Turned towards the earth because she can no longer stand upright. She can neither see people nor the sky. She only sees the feet of those who are going to the Sabbath. And she remains standing on the outside, as she should because she is not permitted to enter as a sick person. She is bowed down by her illness and by being abandoned by God, but still ready to listen. And then someone speaks to her. A stranger! Someone who calls from the middle. She gains confidence and sets off. Very slowly at first. From the edge of the crowd to the middle. To him. She cannot see him. Only his feet. And then she hears the words: "Woman, you are redeemed!" And she feels his hands and feels how his words penetrate her whole body. She feels how his words straighten her body. She feels how everything is loosened. Her spirit too. She can breathe a sigh of relief again. Everything that has become twisted and petrified over the course of 18 years is relaxed. She looks up. She sees not just feet, but people, faces. She looks at him. The stranger. There is something in him that goes far beyond them all. More than a healer. For the first time in a long time she sees a face and then heaven too. For the first time she sees God! The power of God! And she begins to praise God.

And then there is the other one. The head of the house. Unlike the woman, he stands bolt upright and is strangely untouched. No, he is not just untouched. He is downright angry. There are six days when you can work and then you can experiment with healing on those days. But not on the Sabbath! Has this guy simply not understood God? Or does he feel threatened? Is he perhaps afraid that God will touch him too? Is he afraid that he will have to clear away his entire belief system and, like this woman, suddenly have to stand before Jesus alone? Jesus alone! Faith alone. That would be almost unbearable! Whatever the reason for his objection, his eyes remain closed. He sees everything and yet sees nothing. Neither the healing of the woman nor her praise. He is the one in charge! He wants to keep his composure and is afraid of losing it. Perhaps he is afraid of the question I asked at the beginning: "Do you really believe or are you just pretending?"

And then there is the third one. That is Jesus himself. His answer is shocking: "You hypocrites!" he says. His criticism is fierce and yet strangely without hatred. He criticizes. He denounces but at the same time wants to win the keeper of the synagogue over with a good argument. And he wants to do this by setting an example. "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water it?" The argument makes sense. Not only because it is explicitly described that way in the Old Testament. If one would help an ox or a donkey in need as a matter of course, how much more a daughter of Abraham who needs help, should be helped! . That makes sense. A convincing argument!

And some were ashamed. They all stood in the middle, shocked. Somehow everyone had the feeling that a line had been crossed. The woman who came from the border of poverty and loneliness suddenly finds herself in the middle with a complete different future. The leader who

suddenly stood in front of the broken shards of his rules and has to ask himself the question: „What now? How do I go from here?“ Some praised God. Out of shock or perhaps even embarrassment. Such embarrassment also affects us when we suddenly stand alone in front of Jesus. Shame and joy are mixed in our story. Shame because we suddenly realize that things are so different from what we had imagined them to be. Joy because we see that God is there and is lifting us up. I have to think again of the question I asked at the beginning: "Do you really believe?" Do you really believe that Jesus is in the middle and healed this woman? Do you really believe that Jesus is still in the middle today and is calling people. Do you really believe that Jesus is in your church. And that it is precisely for this reason that it is worth inviting people to get to know him? Just as he calls you and me, so too does he call the others. The answer to this question hits us in the heart. It makes us embarrassed. And yet it is not entirely unimportant and has the potential to open heavens doors and the potential to open our eyes so that we can see this heaven. Today, many things are different than they were back then when people flocked to the synagogue. Today, people tend to stream away from the church. They don't need faith. They don't need Jesus either. And they no longer have to pretend that they believe in God or not, but say quite openly that such a belief is absurd, outdated or childish. And that can make it harder for us to say: "Yes, I believe! I believe in this Jesus! I believe that he is there and that he can and wants to help!" Such an answer can be upsetting and can also be a challenge to us. And yet this very confession of "Yes, I believe!" is important and is also a command from Jesus himself. We should tell others. But even more important is the one who stands in the middle. Jesus himself. And this Jesus is calling. He calls us to the middle. Away from the distortion of past mistakes and sins. Away from the hatred that weighs us down. And he invites us to leave the paths where we thought we were on the right path and yet were lost. Everyone meets in the middle. We raise our eyes and see Jesus in the face. A light goes on for us! The arguments and hatred that have become petrified in our hearts are resolved. We look at Jesus and yet see more. We look far beyond the horizon and think we suspect that he really exists. This God who has spread his arms wide and wants to embrace us and the many, to comfort and to lift us up. We raise our eyes and see heaven. God is among us and heals us and the many. "Yes, I really believe! I believe in God! I believe in Jesus! Praise be to the name of the Lord! Amen.