

**Don't Wait to Be Asked**  
Luke 13: 10-17  
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Good morning.

I'm glad to see everyone here in the congregation this morning. Especially because weather in Washington this week was brutal. It reminds me of the old joke that the motto of the Washington Chamber of Commerce is: "Come for the traffic -- you'll stay for the humidity."

Today's Gospel reading has been the subject of a lot of scholarly commentary on the life of the historical Jesus, relationships between Jesus and Jewish theological leadership at the time, and the miracles that the Gospel reports Jesus performed.<sup>1</sup> Each of those topics is interesting, but not what I want to talk about this morning.

Instead, I want to talk about two aspects of the Gospel reading that I think are very pertinent to us, today, as laypeople who are members of Holy Cross Episcopal Church.

So here up-front are the two big ideas I want us to think about this morning:

- Don't wait to be asked: Jesus tells us when you see a need, act!
- Make up your own mind: don't let other people's interpretation of religious tradition hold you back.

To begin, let's walk through the passage in Luke Chapter 13 and see where my two big ideas are present.

First thing to notice is that, unlike many of the other Gospel stories where people petition Jesus for help, in this Gospel passage, Jesus sees someone in need and helps her *without any request on her part*.

When Jesus "was teaching in one of the synagogues,"<sup>2</sup> we read, "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>3</sup> And, "When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."<sup>4</sup> And then she stood up.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Luke.i.html> [accessed online at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Luke.i.html>]; Darrell Bock, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Luke, Vol. 3* (Downers Grove, Ill, Intervarsity Press, 1994); Fred Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Luke 13:10

<sup>3</sup> Luke 13:11

<sup>4</sup> Luke 13:12

So, pretty interesting. Jesus saw the women's need *on his own*. She did not petition him for help. Jesus saw her, understood her condition, and acted. In many other passages in the New Testament, it is suggested that Jesus performs miracles because of the intensity of the faith of the recipient.<sup>5</sup> This passage in Luke tells us that is the wrong conclusion.

Jesus is not performing miracles because the faith of the recipients makes them “worthy” of miracles. As the authors of several epistles make clear, there is nothing that anyone, you or me, could do that would make us “worthy” of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

Instead, Jesus in this passage from Luke sees someone in need as defined in the second part of the Great Commandment: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.<sup>7</sup>

So, without any prompting, without any request from the crippled woman, Jesus saw someone in need, and acted.

This, I suggest, is a pretty profound lesson for us laypeople. One, I will remind you, that Jamie has been asking us to consider in her recent sermons.

Are we, members of the congregation of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross, going about life with the understanding that we might meet people in need of service? Are we waiting for them to ask for help? Or, instead, do we know that Christ intends for us to *act*?

Do you and I walk around comfortable in our idea that we would help anyone who asked *explicitly*, but missing the observable need for help? That, to me, is one of the two most important questions from this part of Luke Chapter 13: *Are you and I prepared to help when we see it is needed?*

Asked that way, the question makes me squirm. It pulls me out of my comfort zone, my ability to walk around with iPhone earbuds disconnecting me from the people around me.

Thought about in this way, Luke Chapter 13 is pretty unsettling for us laypeople. We are being told: Pick your head up. Look around. When you see a need, when you know that Jesus would want you to act, and is calling you to action, *act!*

Don't wait to be asked. Help. But -- start small.

Think about your fellow church members this morning, the people sitting next to you this morning in the pews. Each could use your help, if only you thought about that. Did they have a hard week? Sickness in their family?

Expand that idea. All of the people you will encounter this week, brush-by or family member, could probably use similar help. Look around you this week. With a new set of eyes, a set of Luke Chapter 13 eyes, can you see people who need help even if they are not asking you directly? What is God calling on you to do?

So now we get to my second big idea question:

- Is your understanding of mainstream religion holding you back from offering Christ's help to people?

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 8:5-13; Matt. 9:27-29; Mark 5:34

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 5:17; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8

<sup>7</sup> Mark 12:28-31; Matt. 22: 26-40; Luke 10:27

I bet if I could take an instant opinion poll of the congregation right now, I would get told that 99% of everyone agrees with the nice ideas I have talked about so far.

If I asked you, would *you* be willing to give alms to a disabled veteran, or help her get to a shelter, 100% of everyone here today would say yes.

But, if I asked a follow-on question, would *you* be comfortable in explaining to people you are helping because you are an Episcopalian and Jesus has instructed you to help, I bet you would run for the exits.

So, the reading today from Luke should also reassure you that you are not the first person to feel uncomfortable. Jesus got called out on this all the time by the synagogue leadership.

In today's lesson, he gets criticized for performing a healing on the Sabbath. Jesus shot right back: he says in air quotes, "Get a grip on your priorities. Healing on the Sabbath is not a bug, it is a feature."

I think for many of us today, this sort of "religious political correctness" makes us, you and me, gun-shy about explaining the fact we are Christians and how that is our motivation for action. Episcopalians are naturally shy. We need to get over this. The fastest growing faith affiliation in the US in polling is "no faith." We need to learn how to be witnesses for our good work without embarrassment.

The next time you do something nice for your sister-in-law, something she didn't expect, think about how you might say, "Thanks, it's because we are family and also because I am a Christian."

I can actually put all these ideas into a suggestion for you on what to do this week and in the coming month. With Denise's departure, Holy Cross is going to enter into a period of transition. Holy Cross needs your help. We need more volunteers in our programs. And we will especially need more volunteers in support of worship and liturgy. Chalice bearers, ushers, Altar and Flower Guilds, acolytes, readers.

Don't wait to be asked. Your parish needs your help.

So, when laypeople preach, I think the sermon should end up with a short take-away list of what to do. I think my list has been pretty clear, but here it is to put into your iPhone:

- Look for someone to help this week without being asked
- If you help someone outside church this week, try to find a way to explain you did so because Jesus Christ told you to help
- And, finally, ask yourself, how can I help Holy Cross in transition?

For me, one of the most important things to remember about Holy Cross is that we have all been brought together for the purpose of learning how to be a collective body of Christ. Luke 13 is the instruction manual. Let's spend some time following it.

Amen