

## Peacemaker Sunday, Part II, The First Baptist Church of Worcester Rev. Natalie Webb, 8/25/19

### Luke 13:10-17

Last week, we talked about what it means to be a *peacemaker*. We looked at Jesus' ministry in the gospel of Luke and saw that, while it is characterized by peace – feeding, healing, forgiving, - his peaceful ministry was (and is) the cause of great division. “Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No. But rather division. From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three...,” we heard Jesus say. His peaceful actions were met with violent re-actions: arguments, families torn in two, religious disunity, violence and murder. Jesus has a way of making us pick sides, of bringing tension to the surface. So what is peace really, we asked? We took a page out of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and said that true peace, positive peace “is not the absence of tension, but the presence of justice.”

Today in our gospel reading, we're back to a Jesus that feels more familiar... No bringing fire to the earth and causing division, right? Just a healing story. Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on his way to Jerusalem, when he sees a woman who has been physically bent over for 18 years. He calls her to him, and says “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” He touches her, and she immediately stands up straight. Jesus brings this woman peace, and everyone praises God and parties all night, right? If only. This story may feel more familiar than last week's text, but I think it's actually the perfect case study, the perfect example, of what Jesus was talking about before. This is what it looks like when Jesus brings peace and justice: someone on the margins - someone mostly forgotten - is lifted up, put in the center of Jesus' ministry, healed, set free - then all hell breaks loose. Indignant leaders take issue with Jesus' methods. “Well of course we are for healing, but not today! Not like that! Not in worship!” “You didn't follow the proper procedure, Jesus!” “Slow your roll, Jesus, you've got to do things the right way, get the right people on your side first, make sure you've got this stuff approved by the proper authorities.”

It sounds a lot like what most white clergy told Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't approve of your methods...”. Can't you wait for a “more convenient season”? No. It cannot wait. For MLK and for Jesus, peacemaking was, peacemaking is, *urgent*. The question for peacemakers is not “When is the right time?” or “What is the perfect way?” to go about bringing peace. There is no right time or perfect method. And if Jesus can't do it without causing tension, without bringing division, without getting badmouthed and plotted against, then I don't think we can expect our peacemaking efforts to result in any trophies or parties, either. The question for peacemakers is, “Who do I see in front of me that, like the woman in our story today, has been bent over, bound, pushed to the sidelines for 18 years?” “Where is Jesus at work unbinding people from spirits of oppression?” “Where is God bringing peace and causing a ruckus?”

What are the spirits that debilitate God's children now? That keep people from being able to stand up straight? How about the Spirit of White Supremacy? Today marks the 400<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of the slave trade in America, the landing of the first ship of enslaved Africans in Virginia. Four centuries later, we are still trying to name and exorcise this demon that continues to oppress and kill black people (through police brutality and mass incarceration), that continues to kill and oppress Latinx people (who were targeted in the El Paso mass shooting earlier this month, who are treated as in-human in detention camps in our country). Or what about the Spirit of Toxic Masculinity? That spirit that teaches our boys at a very young age that violence is the way to being a real man (“boys will be boys...” – that men are entitled to women’s bodies – that boys are not allowed to be vulnerable... How can we cast that spirit out so that our sons and daughters can stand up straight and not be crushed by its weight? What else is weighing you and your neighbors down?

Jesus invites us to join him in the hard work of true, positive peacemaking in our world. To do this, we have to notice and name the things that debilitate us and those around us. We have to reach out to touch and heal each other. This will absolutely be uncomfortable. This will absolutely lead to tension. This will absolutely disturb the false, negative peace that those of us in positions of privilege idolize. Will we join Jesus anyway?