

## **From Our Theologian-in-Residence, Michael Craighead - Luke 13:10-17**

Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on a sabbath. A stranger shows up, and the people from around there believe she has been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. Jesus sees her, calls her over and says, 'Woman, you are free from your ailment'. He then lays hands on her. She did not ask him for anything; she had not even approached him, which is a good picture of the way women were separated from men in the synagogue. She is immediately healed and presumably the spirit which had kept her bent in pain was banished. She praises God. That's it. The passage gives her no lines, no asking for healing, no thanks after healing. It's not even said she knew who Jesus was.

This looks like a healing story with the addition of a legal disputation at the end. But after you read it a few times you realize it is just the reverse. This is an explicit denunciation of following the letter of the Law, when the needs of our neighbor are right in front of us, resulting in an exorcism and healing as an example. The exorcism and healing happen pretty quickly and are not much to marvel at during this part of Jesus' ministry. Much longer healing stories, focused on the healing, were in Luke.

After the healing, the passage shifts to what it appears we are supposed to take from this reading. We already knew Jesus could heal her. And Jesus knows very well that this is the sabbath and what he did was considered work, which violated sabbath laws. So the synagogue leader was right when he took Jesus to task for this display of mercy and kindness, which was done on the wrong day, according to the Law. Then Jesus, who we like to think of as mild and gentle, as he was when he healed the woman, lashes into the leader with one of the worst things he called people. 'You hypocrites!'. They would perform work with their farm animals but were angry about healing a person? This made his accusers ashamed, because they knew he was right. Luke is telling us directly that mercy trumps legalism, that love trumps rules. And, and oh yes, Jesus can heal and teach. As in so many of the stories about Jesus, the central issue is Love.