

August 25, 2019 'It's an Eagle, NOT a Chicken!' Rev. Jane Courtright
(Luke 11:13-21, New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus is once again in the synagogue teaching,
and like preachers looking out **over a modern congregation**,
His eyes scan the crowd.

Suddenly, they **STOP**
when he sees a woman '*bent over and crippled.*'

In her eyes, he sees that she has had a spirit
that has left her unable to stand up STRAIGHT for 18 yrs.
We can imagine Jesus looking at her with compassion.

Unlike others, who tried to reach Jesus for healing,
whether by being lowered through a roof
or touching the hem of his cloak,
this woman remains **where she is.**

And Jesus goes up to HER and says,
"Woman, you are set free from your ailment."
And then he lays his hands on her!

So, Jesus heals this woman on the Sabbath.
But the story is about MORE than the breaking – or not breaking
of the commandment against work on the Sabbath.
This story moves us
to an even deeper understanding of
the demand for justice and the compassion
which is at the core of Jesus' mission and ministry!

Jesus follows this healing with the observation
that owners of a beast of burden would at least
untie their animal & lead it to water, ***EVEN on the Sabbath!***
For one thing,

the donkey or ox would be important
for their livelihood and for transportation.

Without animals, people's work would be MUCH HARDER!
There would be a heavy price to pay if an animal died or was crippled.
A farmer without an ox, for example,
would only be able to farm a small portion of his land,
greatly limiting his crop and income.

Jesus, of course, must have seen many farmers
break the Sabbath to care for their animals.
SO, JESUS SEES BEHIND THEIR WORDS ON THIS DAY.

Jesus sees that **BEHIND** what appears to be a religious desire
to follow God and God's commandments...
lay a subtle, but real disregard for women and other sick people!

For unlike work animals,
the bent over woman had absolutely NO VALUE in this society.
So, with a flippant remark,
the leader of this synagogue could easily condemn Jesus
and what he did for this woman on that Sabbath Day.
His remark, though, says that
that woman is of less value than an ox or donkey!

Jesus hear the words and reads the hearts of his opponents.
He speaks to their callousness and greed.
Then, he turns the law on its head
and shows how rigid and legalistic
some of the leaders of that day were.

But Jesus also sees this woman and reads her heart.
He gives her back her dignity,

her ability to be productive in society,
her very soul!

The story doesn't say what became of this woman,
But I can imagine a woman given a new lease on life!
for the first time in a LONG TIME,
she understands that she is valuable as a woman of God!

Jesus could read what was in each person that day.
In the leader's heart
he saw pride, arrogance & reliance upon self.
In the woman's heart
He saw frustration, helplessness & loss of control.

JESUS HAD MERCY UPON HER.

Jesus also gives the bent-over woman
a new sense of WHO SHE WAS.

After years of being beaten down
with the belief that she was of no value,
Jesus affirms her whole sense of being.
She is able to once again
live toward her true value & potential!

MUCH LIKE THE EAGLE IN THIS STORY:

Once upon a time, a man went through the forest
looking for any kind of bird to catch and observe.
He caught a young eagle, brought it home,
and put it among his chickens, ducks and turkeys.
He gave it chicken food to eat,
even though it was an eagle.

Five years later, a naturalist came to see him.

After going through the garden, said,
“That bird is an eagle, not a chicken!”

“Yes,” said the owner, “But I have trained it be a chicken.
It is no longer an eagle, it **IS** a chicken...even though
it measures 15 feet from tip to tip of its wings”

“**NO**,” answered the naturalist, “it is an eagle still;
It has the heart of an eagle, and I will help it
SOAR high up into the heavens.”

“**NO**,” said the owner. “It is a chicken and it will **NEVER** fly.”

They finally agreed to test it.

The naturalist picked up the eagle, held it up,
and said with great intensity,
“Eagle, you are an eagle;
you belong to the sky and not to the earth;
stretch forth your wings and fly!”

The eagle looked this way and that,
and then, looking down,
saw the chickens eating their food & jumped down.

The owner said, “I told you it is a chicken.”

“**NO**,” the naturalist answered.
“It is an eagle. Give it another chance tomorrow.”

So, the next day, he took it to the top of the house & said,
“Eagle, you are an eagle; stretch forth your wings & fly!”
But again, the eagle, seeing the chickens,
jumped down and fed with them.

Again, "I told you – it **IS** a chicken!"

"**NO**," asserted the naturalist.

"It **IS** an eagle & has the heart of an eagle.

Give it one more chance & we will see it fly tomorrow."

The next morning he got up early
and took the eagle outside and far away from the houses,
to the foot of a high mountain.

The sun was just rising,
gilding the top of the mountain with gold.

He picked up the eagle and said,

**"Eagle, you ARE an eagle;
you belong to the sky and not to the earth;
stretch forth your wings and fly!"**

The eagle looked around and trembled,
BUT IT DID NOT FLY.

The naturalist then make it look straight at the sun.

Suddenly, it stretched out its wings and,
with the screech of an eagle,
mounted higher and higher and never returned.

**THOUGH IT HAD BEEN KEPT & TAMED AS A CHICKEN,
IT WAS AN EAGLE.**

Just as the owner of the bird
had a way of **DE-EAGLE-IZING** the eagle,
Society has a way of **DE-HUMAN-IZING** us.
Of course, we **ARE** society,
..... we have our ways of **dehumanizing others.**

When this happens,
we lose our ability to see our worth
as people of God, loved by God!

That's why, near the end of today's gospel story,
Jesus names the bent over woman as a daughter of Abraham.

THE POWER OF A NAME!

I think of my own sense of call as I read this passage.
Often, people will ask me seriously,
"Why do you keep your birth name?"
They wonder why I have chosen to keep my father's family name.

A large part of the reason has to do with the knowledge
that my father's mother worked very hard most of her life
To keep their family together after her husband left her,
with little means of support & 4 small children
during the depression years.

My father, her oldest child,
left high school early to find work to help her.
After he married my Mom & they had children,
Even with no high school diploma,
My Dad worked hard to rise eventually to the position
of a vice president of the company
he worked with for more than 35 years.

My Dad instilled in me the confidence and ambition
to become the first person in our immediate & extended family
to graduate from college and then later from seminary.

The Courtright family spirit leaped through us

into my son Philip
who eventually earned a Master's degree with high honors.

I keep my name because I want to honor my family...
& what I have become
is also because of my family who loved me.

I AM PROUD TO BE NAMED COURTRIGHT.

AND I AM PROUD TO KNOW THAT I AM A DAUGHTER OF ABRAHAM.

The power of a name, the power of the knowledge
of being unconditionally loved,
can and does transform us,
gives us the courage to move forward,
whatever the circumstances.

There are bent over women, men & children everywhere.
Who will show them God's unconditional love?
Who will give them the courage to move forward?

WHO WILL HELP THEM STRAIGHT AGAIN?

As followers of Jesus,
WE are called to help them stand straight again.

Like all those bent over, we also have this blessing –
Jesus says to us,

***“Daughters of Abraham, sons of Abraham,
Go forth into the world changed,
For you are forgiven and loved by God.***

STRETCH FORTH YOUR WINGS AND FLY!

*“Father Abraham has many kids,
many kids has Father Abraham.
I am one of them & so are YOU...
so, let’s all praise our God!*

AMEN!